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BELIEVE ME, MEN, YOU GET CLEANER,



# BLACK MASK

VOL. XXXII, No. 2

**NOVEMBER, 1948** 

K. S. WHITE, Editor

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Cover painted for Black Mask by Peter Stevens

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# Mr. Micawber was only half-right!

MR. MICAWBER'S financial advice to young David Copperfield is justly famous.

Translated into United States currency, it runs something like this:

"Annual income, two thousand dollars; annual expenditure, nineteen hundred and ninety-nine dollars; result, happiness. Annual income, two thousand dollars; annual expenditure, two thousand and one dollars; result, misery."

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# AUTOMATIC SAVING IS SURE SAVING - U.S. SAVINGS BONDS



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STRAIR

WEAR, 1657 S. Second St.,

Milwaukee 4. Wis.

# CAN YOU TAKE THE WITNESS?

Or Can He Take You?

By JULIUS LONG







1

If you were going to seek legal advice in a criminal case would you employ a lawyer, an attorney, an attorney-at-law, a barrister, a solicitor, or an attorney and counsellor-at-law?

Which class would you select for a civil case?

.

Everybody knows that an accused man may be convicted on circumstantial evidence alone without the presentation of any direct evidence against him even when the charge is homicide. We wonder, however, how many people can distinguish between direct and circumstantial evidence when they see it. The following are examples of each: 1) Testimony of witness: "I saw the defendant an hour after the crime, and there was blood on his clothes." 2) Testimony of witness: "I was driving past the murdered man's house, and saw the defendant go into it fifteen minutes before the crime was committed." 3) Testimony of witness: "I saw the defendant lift a shotgun and fire pointblank at the murdered man." 4) Testimony of witness: "I heard the defendant argue with the murdered

#### CAN YOU TAKE THE WITNESS?

man a week before the crime that he should take out an insurance policy in his favor." 5) State's Exhibit No. 5: An insurance policy dated five days before the murder with the beneficiary named being the defendant.

You are defense counsel for Sam Larman, charged with first-degree murder. The D.A. has not been able to offer

a single piece of direct evidence against him to make you request the judge as follows: "Your Honor, I want you to charge the jury that where there is no direct evidence against an accused man. but only circumstantial evidence, the degree of proof has to be a lot greater than where there is direct evidence."

Will the judge sustain your motion and so charge the jury?

You are the D.A. trying Elmer Smith for first degree murder. It's a tough case, but you're sure you'll convict Elmer on the circumstantial evidence that you have. It's a long chain of circumstances, and one of the vital links is the fact that Elmer knew his business partner, the man he allegedly murdered, had named Elmer beneficiary in his last will and testament. You seek to prove this by introducing evidence that shortly before the murder, Elmer priced Cadillac cars, something he surely would not have done if he had not counted on coming into a lot of money. The defense counsel obiects to the introduction of such evidence, but you argue that you are entitled to introduce any evidence proving any circumstance tending to show Elmer's guilt. Will the judge sustain the defense counsel's objection or will he permit you to offer such evidence?

(Continued on page 122)

# Worth a King's Ransom at a time like this...



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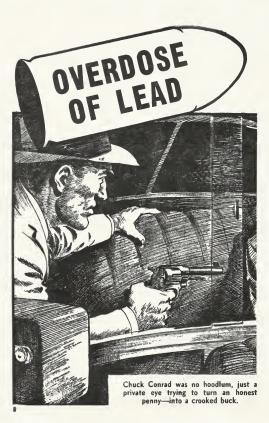
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**WORLD'S FINEST FLASHLIGHTS AND BATTERIES** OLIN INDUSTRIES, INC., Electrical Division, New Haven, Conn.



## By CURTIS CLUFF

OME Broadway psychologist has said that a nightclub audience has two standard reactions towards enterfainment: if it's bad, they complain about it; if it's good, they ignore it.

The hushed attention and the rapt expressions of enjoyment in the Club Raspail were sufficient proof that a generalization is little more than an interesting arrangement of words.

There was no illumination except the exit lights glowing dimly against the walls and a baby spot reaching down to outline the dark, exquisitely modeled face of the singer. Slim-hipped and full-breasted, she wore a sleek black evening



gown cut in a manner to convince the most skeptical that nature hadn't needed any assistance from the dressmaker. She was singing the blues—real lowdown gutbucket—with none of the facial contortions, none of the twisting and squirming, that Swing Street has come to associate with putting over a song. She was backed by a small combo that stayed in there with her, real low, building her up. It was real Storyville stuff, the kind I had heard only on records. I hadn't expected her to be that good.

The song ended, the lights came up and the audience tried to tear the roof off. I did my share. She flashed a smile, bowed and walked off, came back and bowed again. There were frenzied cries of "More! More!" Jeanne Barre laughed with pleasure, shook her head, blew a kiss to the audience and went off. The customers subsided reluctantly as the lights dimmed again and couples moved out to the dance floor. I threw a sawbuck on the table, got up and elbowed my way back to the curtained doorway and went in.

I walked down the badly-lit hall past the squealing bedlam of the chorus dressing room, located the singer's door and knocked.

"Who is it?"
"Chuck Conrad."

HERE was a rustle of silk, quick light footsteps and the door swung open. Jeanne Barre smiled, waved me in and shut the door. A mannish, tallored jacket was thrown over her bare shoulders. She couldn't have been more than five-four including the high heels. Her dark, almost ebony hair was done in a braid, outlining large, wide brown eyes and a level, straightforward stare, and she seemed to be taking an inventory of her own.

I pulled out the pale blue envelope. "I got this in the afternoon mail."

She put out her hand. "Should we be introduced formally? I'm Jeanne Barre." I took her hand. "I heard you for the

first time tonight. You're good."

"Thank you. I've got plenty to learn." She withdrew her hand before I grew onto it, sat down at the dressing table and indicated the chair beside it. She picked up a pack of cigarettes, offered it to me and lit her own. She stared at her reflection in the mirror, got up and locked the door, came back and turned the chair around and sat facing me.

"Tell me about Mike Glasgow."

I look at her quizzically. "It's been in the papers for a week."

"I want to hear you tell it. Your part of it, I mean."

"You didn't send that slightly hysterical billet-doux just to get me down here and listen to the story of my life—I hope."

hope."

She smiled sweetly and didn't answer.

I got up. "Well, the evening wasn't wasted. I enjoyed your singing."

She said: "Where are you going?"

"Look, honey," I said politely, "your word is no doubt a command in your own little saloon circle, but I don't happen to be a member of the club. If you're looking for a spicy tidbit of dinner party conversation, you'll have to get yourself another bov."

"What are you talking about?"

"A cheap way of attracting attention to yourself. 'Oh, by the way,' "I mimicked, "'Chuck Conrad came back to my dressing room the other night and just fell all over himself telling me all about it. And I always thought private detectives were so hush-hush about everything."

Jeanne Barre flushed. "I asked you to come and see me because I am in trouble. I didn't come to your office because I didn't care to be seen going there. My note was purposely obscure because I wanted a good chance to size you up before absolutely committing myself."
"Why didn't you say that in the first place? What do you want done?"

She glared at me. "I need intelligent advice and assistance. I asked you to tell the story yourself because I wanted to see if you believed your own publicity. How else could I judge you?" She glared harder. "Thus far, I'm inclined to think you're not very bright. You have certainly given one of the worst exhibitions of touchiness and utterly nasty dispositions it has been my unpleasant privilege.

I grinned and sat down. "You kind of explode on a short fuse yourself, honey."

"Don't call me 'honey!" Her eyes flashed and she got set to loose another blast. Then, like the sudden calm after a summer storm, she exhaled slowly and grinned at me. "I'm sorry. My approach was wrong and I apologize."

"Do you still want me to recite?"

"Please!"

to witness."

I shrugged. It was screwy, but in my business prospective clients are not noted for the sanity of their requests. I told her what there was to know.

Mike Glasgow had come blasting out of the Bible Belt half a dozen years ago. My path had crossed his a year back when I was trying to locate two hundred thousand dollars worth of Seymore Trust Bonds. There were plenty of witnesses to prove that the bonds had left the Seymore Trust Building in a gunny sack carried by one Mike Glasgow who happened to be carrying a tommy gun in the other hand. After several months of running down bum leads, I got a line on a fence who was supposed to have handled the bonds. I found him in a third-rate Albany hotel room. Unfortunately, he had died of a sudden overdose of lead a few hours before I got to him. The bonds were still missing.

Trailing Mike after that had been a long dull job. When we finally closed in on the Bronx apartment, Sergeant Carter, a meathead if there ever was one, got the signals crossed and went in too soon. That gave the show away and Mike his girl, Sadie Rhine, and Billy De Rento came out blasting. I was getting out of a car with Lieutenant Kondos when the sedan shifted into high and roared off.

I threw a lucky shot into a front tire, the sedan went out of control, knocked over a fireplug. Billy De Rento went partway through the windshield, nearly severing his head from his body. He died instantly although we didn't know it at the moment. Sadie, who had been driving, climbed out and instead of raising her hands like a good girl, started shooting. Kondos cut her down while I was running along the opposite sidewalk behind a row of parked cars. It really was a helluva rat-race. Sirens wailing, the busted fireplug sending up a geyser and then Mike Glasgow flat on his belly in the street pumping a tommy gun.

Sergeant Carter and a patrolman named House came running out of the apartment building. That part was murder. Glasgow, firing neat patterned bursts, cut them to pieces. Definitely not a sight for a weak stomach. Then he proceeded systematically to ventilate the car behind which Kondos was hiding. But the fat lieutenant had a snug spot in the gutter and was waiting patiently for a decent shot when I came up behind Mike and wrapped my .38 around his skull. We found the bonds in the front seat of the car and the boys downtown were partly satisfied at the prospect of having at least one hood to burn-a cop-killer at that.

HAT was a week ago.

Two days ago, Mike fooled them and pulled a Goering. He had kept the metal tip of a shoelace under his tongue for five days, and two nights

ago he had slashed his wrists after lightsout. So now the whole trio was in hood's heaven, probably pleased as punch because they had cheated the chair. Like the Fat Nasty from Nuremberg, it hadn't seemed to occur to them that no matter which way you die, you are just as dead.

Jeanne Barre listened without comment. Then she asked: "Was Mike Glasgow as smart and tough as the newspapers said?"

I pondered. "He was tough and unpredictable and not afraid to fight for what he wanted. So are most wild animals. But smart? Uh-uh. A smart crook gets at other people's money by getting to be president of the bank. Only a hood is dumb enough to pull off the same thing with nothing but a gun in his hand"

"But Mike was tough?"

"Mike was tough," I agreed.

"But you trailed him and you weren't afraid to tackle him," she said thoughtfully.

I grinned. "If you're looking for a hero, you're talking to the wrong guy. Sure, I was afraid. But it happens to be my racket. I collected my regular fee, I had the law on my side and I got a ten thousand dollar bonus for being lucky."

She was silent for a moment, "I can't pay you that much."

"What kind of a jam are you in?" "Do you know anything about me?

My so-called career, I mean?" "Only what I read in the columns. In other words, nothing."

Jeanne chose her words with care. "A

few years ago, I was singing at a little place in Greenwich Village. Jock Shields, whom I didn't know then, came in one night, heard me sing and called me over to his table. He told me that I had possibilities and with the right build-up I could be a success. To make it brief, he became my agent then and there. The week after our first meeting he began

the build-up. I moved into a small, expensive apartment, bought good clothes, and began to work with voice and dramatic coaches. For the past two years I've done summer stock. Two weeks ago I signed a seven year contract with Cyclops pictures. I'm leaving for Hollywood next week."

"So far, you sound like Cinderella."

"I have felt the same way." Her voice was somber.

"How did the clock strike midnight? Shields?"

She smiled bitterly. "I wish it was that simple. You see, everything cost money, far more than I was making. I assumed Jock was paying the bills, gambling he would get it back when I moved into the higher brackets. I worked like a dog, to justify his faith in me." She shuddered. "About this time last night, that door swung open and two hard-faced young men came in and stood on either side of it. Then, Jock entered, followed by a stranger. He was a dark, heavy man with the coldest eves I've ever seen. Jock introduced my backer-Abe Sengler."

I winced.

Jeanne Barre nodded. "My bills have been paid by a racketeer whom I'd never even met until last night."

"I don't get it."

She shrugged. "It turns out that, during the early days when I was signing papers so fast my head was swimming, I signed an agreement with Abe Sengler granting him thirty percent of my gross income any time he chose to begin claiming it, in repayment for his loans. It was Sengler who first heard me sing at the Green Wheel and offered to put up the money if Jock thought I was good enough and would agree to handle me."

"You claim you didn't know anything about the contract until last night?"

"I didn't know anything about it. I

just told you, I signed so many things."

"The contract didn't just blow in the window. Somebody had to give it to you to sign."

"Jock gave it to me."

"Does he claim he didn't know what you were signing?"

"Of course he knew."

"But he never mentioned it from the day you signed it until last night?"

HE bit her lip. "You're wondering how that can be. The answer is so simple it would be amusing it didn't mean so much to me. Jock never mentioned it because I didn't. He saw no reason for upsetting me by bringing it up since I, myself, apparently avoided the subject."

I grinned. "It might wash."

"Every word of it is true," she said earnestly.

"What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to get me back that con-

tract without publicity."
"What does Shields say?"

She smiled. "I feel a bit guilty, but I'm not sure I'm going to tell Jock that I've consulted you unless you think

something can be done."
"Why?"

"He points out, quite rightly, that a breath of scandal can ruin a public performer. If it leaked out that I had accepted the backing of a notorious racketeer, it would finish me in Hollywood before I got started. Jock is afraid of Sengler and he wants to let things ride until he can hit on a really foolproof scheme for getting the contract back."

"He should have thought of all that when he got you to sign it."

She shrugged. "We won't cry over spilt milk. What are my chances of getting back the contract?"

"There is no record of anybody welshing on Abe Sengler and getting away with it," I said flatly.

"I don't like that word, Mr. Conrad," she said sharply. "I'm perfectly willing to buy back the contract."

"Have you got the money?"

"If I haven't, I don't see why I can't borrow it on my picture contract."

"Could be," I said slowly. "The lender could take out insurance against anything happening to you or the picture contract."

"Do you think we can swing it?"

I shook my head. "I don't see any reason for Abe to sell. You're just getting into the chips and he's got you over a barrel. He doesn't even have to stop at thirty percent of your income."

"What am I to do?"

I thought about Abe Sengler. He had practiced a One World doctrine of his own for almost two decades now and there was no question about who was sitting on top of that world.

Abe hadn't had any real trouble from young men with ambition since about ten years ago when he threw a little shindig since known among the initiated as the "Jersey Barbecue." At that time he suspected a palace revolution brewing among some of his strong boys and threw a party for them in a Jersey farmhouse. It was quite a brawl since Abe has quite a few high-spirited lads in his organization. When the suspects had passed out, along with several innocent members of the mob, Abe and a chosen few saturated the farmhouse with gasoline, lit it, and ran outside volline. "Fire" in the power of the mob. Abe and a chosen few saturated the farmhouse with gasoline, lit it, and ran outside volline. "Fire" in the property of the propert

It is said that it was quite an amusing sight to see the drunks staggering and crawling from the building, their clothing in flames. When two of the guilty crew dropped from a second-story window. Abe machine-gunned them personally. Several innocent members of the mob perished in the flames but, as Abe remarked in a not too subtle pun, they were only small fry anyway. Nobody was ever able to prove anything but

according to the story, Louis Blinchok, Abe's shadow, couldn't hold food on his stomach for three days and gave away a hundred and fifty dollar suit because the cleaners were unable to remove the odor of burnt flesh from the garments. Abe kept his clothes and wore them on suitable occasions as a reminder to the boys. They stayed reminded.

Jeanne Barre was saying: "-I'll pay your regular fee beginning now. If, after you've thought it over for a day or two. you can't find a way to help me, we can consider the matter closed. However, if you're successful in getting me the contract and without publicity, I'll pay you a thousand dollars," She paused and studied my grimace. "What's the matter? Isn't that enough?"

"It's too much," I growled. "Frankly, Sengler is holding all the cards. But for that kind of dough, Conrad is forced to take a hand."

She opened the purse on the dressing table, took out a folding checkbook and fountain pen. She made out the check. waved it in the air to dry and handed it to me. "For expenses."

I looked at it sadly. It was for five hundred dollars and it was drawn on a bank that undoubtedly had that much cash on hand. I was hooked. I sighed, folded the check and stuck it in my pocket.

We rose and Jeanne Barre smiled warmly and put out her hand. "What you're doing means everything in the world to me. Keep that money regardless of the outcome."

"You know as well as I do the chances aren't good."

She nodded. "If there is a way, I believe you'll find it." I started out. She stopped me at the door.

"What are you going to do first?" I grinned at her. "Go home and sleep

on it."

Her lips parted in a wide smile.

"I like you, Chuck Conrad." I said I was glad she did and went out.

#### CHAPTER TWO

#### New at the Racket

HE starter at the Raspail slammed the cab door and I settled back. I saw the redhead coming out and sat up. It was neither suspicion nor a professional reflex that caused me to turn and peer through the rear window. It was merely a healthy, normal interest in a well-turned calf.

The redhead climbed into another cab after pointing toward mine.

I waited three blocks, leaned forward and gave the driver my office address instead. Ten blocks later I got out, paid the driver and turned into Joe's instead of going up to my office.

I ordered a beer and settled down to wait. I waited about three minutes. The redhead came in, cast a quick look along the booths, stalled around until Joe got back to the bar and came toward me. She was twenty-five, a year either way, and on her it looked thirty. She wasn't bad-looking, but the crooked mouth said life hadn't been good to her. She was wearing a short dress, most of which was covered by a fur coat of one of the lesser rodents making like mink. The legs were nyloned and good but definitely. A funny-looking fur and velvet thing perched on her auburn hair and pretended to be a hat. Spike-heeled black open-toed shoes completed the ensemble, a scarlet toenail gleaming through the opening in each shoe. There were fingernails to match. She came over to my booth with a nervous arrogance I was sure she didn't feel.

"Hello, stranger," she said originally. Joe spotted her at the same time, his face hardened and he started around the bar again. I shook my head and he

scowled and turned away. I said: "Sit down, if you want to."

"Thanks." She slid into the booth opposite me, flounced out her short skirt and threw open her coat. "I want a beer. I'll pay for it."

I grinned and signaled the order to Joe. I finished the beer I already had while we waited. Joe brought the mugs over, slammed them down and walked away angrily. Joe runs a respectable place, "where a fambly can come for a glassa beer, not no rendyvooz for tark."

The redhead drank a little beer and seemed to gain courage although her eyes wandered nervously before coming to rest on my face.

"You are Chuck Conrad, aren't you?"
"What about it?"

"I've got something that'll interest you."

"You think that makes you unique?"
She flushed. "You got no right to talk
to me that way."

"How am I supposed to talk to a strange redhead who tails me and goes into that 'Hello, stranger,' routine?"

"Oh, you saw me."

"Well, you do stand out," I admitted pointedly.

She snatched the coat angrily across the front of the low-cut dress and leaned across the table. "Look, Mr. Smart Guy, you're not in the driver's seat. Don't forget that." She sat back and eyed me smugly. "We're hip to the whole layout." I drank some beer. "Who is "We' and

what whole layout are we hip to?"

"Don't play dumb."

I put a dollar on the table to pay for the beers and started to rise. She said: "What are you playing hard-to-get for? She hired you to contact us, didn't she?"

I sat down, took her hand, pulled it across to me and read the inscription on the slave bracelet—"Veronica from Doc."

"O. K., Veronica, spill it."

Veronica's smile would have been con-

fident if her eyes had been willing to help. "You can tell La Barre that we aren't going to be scared off even if she hires a dozen private dicks. Especially if one of them happens to be named Chuck Conrad."

I decided to take up one thing at a time. "Nobody's trying to scare you. It's just that the price is a little steep."

"Five grand? Say, who are you trying to kid?"

"How is Miss Barre going to know this will be the last touch?"

Veronica looked impatient. "I told you we'd hand it over to you."

"You told me?"

"Well, I told her. What's wrong with you?" She looked at me wisely. "But I forget—you're mixed up in it too, aren't you?"

"How do you figure that?"

She continued to look at me smugly. "Maybe we ought to raise the ante—now that we know she fingered Mike Glasgow."

This was news of great interest to me. I was sure it would also be interesting to my great and good friend Barney Aarons, the cabby who had actually pointed out the Bronx hideaway to me and received fifty of my longest and greenest for so doing. I said: "You're sure you can prove that?"

She grinned. "We can prove it."

"That changes things," I said slowly. I looked at her. "You're new at this racket, aren't you?"

"Look, mister, we won't go into the story of my life. All you've got to do is persuade Barre to cough up five thousand bucks. That's not much against a whole career."

I hazarded a guess. "You're an amateur. It must be the boyfriend, probably an amateur, too. Why doesn't he do his own dirty work?"

The look in her eyes got confused and she softened up a little. "Look, Mr. Conrad, I've heard of you before and I think you're a right guy. O.K., so we're amateurs. I don't like this kind of business and neither does my—friend. We need a stake to get out of town, as far from the Big Apple as we can get. We're going to try to start over again. For five G's Miss Barre's worries are over. We'll turn the proof over to you, honest. We need that money,"

"I've heard when some people want a stake bad enough they go to work and earn it legitimately. Crazy people, probably. Doc wouldn't be stupid like that,"

Loyalty flared up and mixed with hatred of me in her eyes. She didn't even bother to deny the name on the slave bracelet. "He—his health isn't so hot. We got to get away to a more invigorating climate."

I had seen enough of Veronica to know all about Doc's health. Girls like Veronica always pick guys like Doc. If it isn't some useless half-man like Doc, it's a stray cat to feed and pet and pamper. The Veronicas of this world have to have somebody to feel important to and they'll go through hell for that feeling. There is nothing you can do about it.

I said: "I don't suppose you have this high-priced proof with you?"

"Have you got five grand with you?"

I allowed as how I hadn't.

"How would it be if I called you tomorrow and told you where to come?" "Call me between ten and eleven."

She nodded, gathered up her purse and slid out of the booth. I rose and she put out her hand hesitantly. I took it. She said embarrassedly: "You're not as bad as you try to make out, Conrad. See you tomorrow." I nodded. "Tomorrow." She turned

and hurried out on slender high heels. The legs were just as good from the rear. The rest of the customers had de-

parted and Joe was polishing glasses industriously. "Sorry I almost butted in

on ya, Chuck. I didn't know it was a business appointment." I said that was O.K.

He shook his head disgustedly. "Some of these dames."

I said: "You took the words out of my mouth."

DECIDED I could save time by taking the subway home. I went down the stairway, deposited my nickel in the turnstile and joined the after-midnight flow toward the platform. I pushed through to the edge of the platform and stood next to a lean priest talking to a short, black-bearded rabbi. I jammed my hands down in my pockets and wondered what Veronica and her boyfriend thought they had on Jeanne Barre. Putting the finger on Mike Glasgow didn't make sense, but I was sure Veronica thought she had something. And Jeanne Barre had wanted to talk about Mike Glasgow. The rumbling approach of the train grew louder and then it roared out of the curve in the tunnel like a confused, angry beast, too long confined.

I started to step back and suddenly a fist or an elbow jammed into the small of my back and I fell forward, danced on the edge of the platform and my foot slipped. It was all over in a second. One moment I was falling out into space, and the next, strong hands were grasping me and pulling me back. I fell on my face, gripped the edge of the platform and hands rolled me out of harm's way. The train swept past and the acrid smell of steel gripping steel combatted the stale air. I lay facing the tracks, the side of the car not a foot from my nose.

I rolled over on my back. The little rabbi released his grip on my leg and straightened. The thin priest who had helped to drag me back was still kneeling, staring speculatively down into my eyes. I blinked at him and his mouth creased in a spare, relieved smile.

I said: "Father, isn't this pushing things a little too far, even to save a soul?" His smile was broader but still not

amused as he shook his head at me and helped me to my feet. The bearded little rabbi was worried.

"Did you-were you-?"

"Did you see who it was?"

Both men shook their heads, I turned and looked over the crowd. Most of them had ignored the incident and were hurrying to get seats in the cars. About a dozen lingered in a semicricle around the three of us, like rhesus monkeys, their faces avid, mischievous, empty of purpose. A squat slattern sidled forward.

"I seen it all. It was a big black fellow pushed you. He was wearing a brown suit and he ran out that way." She pointed back up the stairway.

I said: "Maybe I can eath him." I thanked her and the priest and the rabbi and hurried toward the stairway. All the woman had told me was that she didn't like Negroes. Since she had claimed to see a big black man in a brown suit, it was fairly certain that if I ever caught up with whoever it was, he would turn out to be a little green man in a yellow suit. I had no desire to sit in a subway car as exhibit A for the next ten minutes so I hailed a taxi and went home. I didn't see any big black man.

I sat around the office the next morning killing time and waiting for the telephone call from Veronica. I had just finished one of the trade journals of my profession, less formally known as a tabloid newspaper, when Suzy Porter, my secretary, conscience and sometime financier came back to my office without knocking—as usual. Suzy is a leggy blonde in the middle twenties who would have been extremely beautiful if her face hadn't worn a perpetual expression

of skepticism mixed with small-girl impudence. She sat on the corner of my desk and examined her nails with interest.

"Chuck, do you know a tall, goodlooking man with dark, wavy hair graying at the temples? He also wears clothes wonderfully well."

"Sure. Walter Pidgeon. I don't exactly know him, though."

She made a face at me. "He does look

something like Pidgeon at that," she said dreamily. "He has a friendly, sweet smile and a quiet gentlemanly manner." She threw me a sidelong look as if to say: "Not like some people I know."

"Who is this paragon, some waiter you saw in a restaurant?"

"He says his name is Jock Shields."
"Says?"

"Uh-huh. He's outside."

I twisted the newspaper into a tight roll and swung at her. "Send him in, you pixie. We can play guessing games after hours."

She slid off the desk and escaped from the office without ruffling a hair. Charles Conrad—Investigations is not the most sedate organization in the world.

Shields came in and Suzy's description fitted. Over six feet, tanned face, gray eyes, expensively dressed and a casual, assured manner. I said: "Sit down, Shields. What's on your mind?"

He smiled faintly at my boorish informality, sat, and offered me a hammered silver cigarette case.

"Apparently I just missed you in Miss Barre's dressing room last night. She tells me you're going to do some work for her."

"What about it?"

"Have you done anything yet?"

"I'm working on it."

He looked with tolerant amusement at the stack of newspapers on my desk. "Exactly what have you accomplished thus far?"

"I only took the case last night. It's too early for results."

He raised his eyebrows. "I want you to drop it."

"You kidding?"

He eyed me unsmilingly. "No, and I don't expect you to kid Miss Barre, either. You and I both know that there is nothing you can do. I'm not trying to run down your ability, don't mistake me. You've got a reputation for getting things done and you're tough. But this thing, if it's to be done at all, will have to be done carefully and with finesse. You're not exactly famous for your subtletv."

"You trying to say I don't know my iob?"

Shields smiled deprecatingly, "Since you have a reputation for honesty, I assume you have no ulterior motive in taking the job. But the very fact that you were willing to take it shows you don't fully understand the complexities of the situation."

"You are leaving yourself wide open." "What do you mean by that?"

READ the ceiling. "I know a little something about you, too. Let me see. Jock Shields: been around about fifteen years, handled everything from a Major Bowes unit to a mediumto-fair nightclub. Never in the heavy money. The first time he gets his hands on a blue chip, he practically guarantees he won't cash in by tying her up to Abe Sengler. Now, who doesn't understand the complexities of what situation?"

Shields flushed. "I'm not one of the so-called top agents because I've never gotten the breaks. Jeanne Barre was my first big break and I've done a swell job handling her."

"All except for Abe Sengler," I amended, "With her ability the rest of it was easy. How did Sengler cut in, anyway?"

"I had no choice. It was Sengler's idea."

"How come? You a pal of his?"

"Certainly not. I simply went to the Green Wheel to listen to a new singer. Sengler was there. I was pointed out to him by the manager, a friend of mine. Sengler called me over to his table and asked me what I thought of her. I said she was great, naturally. Sengler asked me how I'd like to manage her with an unlimited expense account to put her over. He wanted to stay out of the picture himself and do it as an investment. I knew what he was, of course, but my enthusiasm ran away with me, I agreed to do it."

I shook my head sadly. "Not bright, chum."

"If you will remember," Shields said acidly, "that was back in the early days of the war when congressmen, shopkeepers, millionaires and racketeers were elbowing each other at the public trough. It didn't seem such a terrible thing at the time for an agent to borrow money from a racketeer to put over a girl singer."

"A smart agent would have thought differently about that contract."

"I made a mistake," he said coldly. "I'll correct it my own way." .

"You've had a lot of time to work on

Shields restrained himself with difficulty, "Will you drop the case?"

"Do you know Veronica?" I asked suddenly.

"Veronica who?"

"Just Veronica, I don't know the rest."

He smiled superciliously. "I'm afraid that doesn't mean much to me."

"What about Mike Glasgow?"

Shields peered at me through lowered lids, ironically. "Oh, come now, we're not going to rehash the exploits of the famous Chuck Conrad?"

I looked at him with distaste. I gicked up the telephone book, found Jeanne Barre's number, dialed and told the maid I wanted to speak to Miss Barre. When she answered I said: "Shields tells me he has advised against my handling the case. I want to know whether you've changed your mind."

There was a pause. "Have you been working on it?"

"Some."

"Do you think you've made progress?"
"Some."

"Is Jock there now?"

"Sitting across the desk from me."

"Let me speak to him."

I handed Shields the phone, got up and walked out to Suzy's office and shut the connecting door. Suzy looked up at the expression on my face, made a clucking sound and went on with her typing.

Shields opened the door and beckoned. His face was flushed and he was very irked in a restrained sort of way. The receiver was still off the hook.

"She wants to talk to you again."

I sat down and picked up the phone. "Have you made up your mind?"

"Chuck, I want you to continue just as we agreed. I'm sorry Jock came to see you without telling me. I hope you're not angry."

I said: "I'm willing to go along with it if I can handle it without any backseat driving from either of you. I'm not sure the job can be done, but I think I can promise that you won't receive unfavorable publicity from any effort of mine." I hoped I was telling the truth.

She laughed. "I don't believe you like my agent."

I grinned into the phone. "That's entirely possible."

"Your arrangement sounds all right to me."

"There's one other stipulation. If we win, we stick to last night's financial arrangement. If we don't, I'll mail your check back to you."

"That's not fair to you."

"It's the way I want it."

"Just as you say. When will I hear from you?"

"In a couple of days. Sooner, if anything breaks." I hung up and turned to Shields. "That O.K. with you?"

He stood up and smiled Good Loser's Smile Number Three. "There is nothing I can do. I hope, for the sake of everybody concerned, that you know what you're doing."

"Thanks, pal, you have no idea how I hope so, too."

Shields bowed like a minor State Department official and left. I looked at my watch. Eleven-thirty and Veronica hadn't phoned. I put on my hat and told Suzy to phone Missing Persons if I wasn't back by five o'clock. Suzy made a face and promised she would.



# CHAPTER THREE

#### Reasonable Blackmail

BE SENGLER looked shorter than his five-feet-ten because of his fat, squat bulk. No matter how hard the tailors strived, he still looked like Sidney Greenstreet trying to wear Fred Astaire's clothes. His face was round, his thick lips parted in a fixed half-smile and tiny wrinkles formed in the corners of his eyes. A careless glance might indicate that this was a carefree, genial man. A closer inspection of the eyes would prove that a mistake had been made. In spite of their openness, they held a bright, curious intentness. At the moment, they seemed to be wondering how long I could hold out after the lighted end of a cigar had been applied to the bottoms of my bare feet. Silence hung heavy in the soundproof inner office. I hadn't been invited to sit down. Abe lolled expressionlessly behind the massive semicircular desk. I shifted my weight to the other foot and repeated patiently: "You own a piece of Jeanne Barre."

Not a muscle moved in the heavy face. "She tell you that?"

I nodded.

He continued to study me. "What else did she tell vou?"

"That she hadn't known you were backing her, that she doesn't want your backing and that she's willing to buy you out."

"For how much?"

"How much does she owe you?" I countered.

Abe's eyes flicked casually over at the ivory and umber safe in the corner and away again. "In round figures, about twenty-four grand."

I didn't bat an eye. "How much do you want for it?"

He smiled a catfish smile. "Say a

hundred and fifty grand—cold cash?"
"Wouldn't you rather have the Holland Tunnel?"

"She's gonna make a lot more than that."

"And you're going to hold her up for

most of it."

Abe shrugged. "With me it's an investment. She's where my dough put her."

"She was a green kid. She didn't know what she was getting into."

Abe's body shook with suppressed laughter. "So she was just a green kid. And now she's got ripe. Did she say she couldn't read five years ago? Did she say that if it hadn't been for my dough she wouldn't still be in that dump where I picked her up?"

"She just says she didn't know what she was doing."

"So she says. Listen, she's got nothing to worry about. I'm not gonna bother her. She's just an investment to me. I guess," he added thoughtfully, "I better have a couple of boys keep an eye on my investment."

"Your investment won't be worth a plugged nickel if her name ever gets linked with yours."

Abe sighed, "Listen, Barre is a lucky girl. She got a break—on my dough. She ain't taking any more chances than she has been all along. Forget it and get down to cases. What's the angle you want to sell me?"

I blinked and stared at him. He was waiting patiently. I said: "What do you think I've been talking about?"

His smile began to harden around the edges, "What do you want?"

I wondered if my brain was going back on me. "I want that contract at a reasonable price."

Abe's smile disappeared. He flipped the intercom switch. "Louis" He reached under the desk and pressed the buzzer unlocking the connecting door. He held it down until Louis Blinchok pushed hurriedly in. Big, blank-faced, long sideburns and a jimmy-jaw.

"Want me. Boss?"

"The shamus is ready to go now." Abe looked at me steadily. "I don't like wise guys and I don't like threats." He grinned without amusement. "I see by the papers they give you a medal in the army for being tough. Maybe you didn't know lots amy boys got medals for that very same thing in the same army. I'm gonna let you off this time because I think you're just dumb. Don't try it again." He looked at Blinchok. "If this punk comes around again, throw him out on his tail. O.K., shamus, on your way."

My jaw had been hanging down to here all through Abe's speech. I hadn't made any threats and I didn't know what caused the outburst. I started to speak but Abe waved a hand in brief dismissal. I got a grip on myself, remembering I wasn't going to collect a thousand dollars bonus for blowing my top, and turned meekly away. I went through the door followed by Louis.

We crossed the two rooms that had been thrown together as an outer office. Four girls pounded away at their mills and sharp-eyed men with hungry faces and padded shoulders talked into telephones out of the corners of their mouths. A teletype in the corner coughed spasmodically and went into action and a couple of high-priority candidates for a room with a barred view of the Hudson shuffled over to read it.

We passed through another buzzercontrolled door to the ante-rooms. I had noticed these heavy metal doors painted to simulate wood on the way in. Without the assistance of the buzzer system, it would be about as easy to reach Abe's private office as it would be to reach the gold at Fort Knox. I crossed the anterooms, where half a dozens assorted hooddums were playing gin rummy, with Louis smirking at my shoulder. I went out into the corridor and Louis slammed the door with finality behind me.

Conrad had definitely lost a round.

BOUGHT a tabloid in the lobby and went out on the dirty street. Abe's Aladdin Hotel was not situated in the most exclusive section of New York. I decided I was at least as hungry as I was sore and turned into a fly-blown cafe. I ordered spam and eggs on the theory that it was one order a joint like this couldn't rune.

I hunched on the stool and stared glumly at my reflection in the mirror. Everything I had touched so far had soured. Veronica had let me down, I had succeeded in making Shields sore, which wasn't my fault, of course, and now Abe Sengler was ready and willing to measure me for a concrete kimono.

I pulled out the tab and laid it beside the spam and eggs and began to eat. The picture spread across the bottom half of the front page was interesting. A woman lying face down on the grass, fully clothed and wearing a coat. The photographer, with his usual thoughtfulness, had arranged the skirt slightly above the backs of her knees. Her face was turned away from the camera. A funny little fur thing that could have been a hat lay a short distance away. The caption said: Beauteous Victim Of Central Park Murder Fiend. I hated to turn to page three.

The victim had been identified by a member of a Waiter's Local as one Veronica Lewis who had worked for a now-defunct nightclub known as the Green Wheel, several years ago. She had been a cigarette girl and part-time' roving photographer taking pictures of night-club patrons. The waiter said he hadn't seen her for five years prior to this morning and didn't know anything about her. No relatives had come for

ward to claim the body and there was no known motive for the murder. The "fiend" part of the story related to the fact that her wrists and face were bruised and the tips of three fingers were blistered around the nails, probably by lighted matches. She had been shot once, through the heart. Police expected an early arrest in the case.

I tried to finish eating but my heart just wasn't in it. In a peculiar sort of way, I had liked Veronica. I thought about calling Lieutenant Kondos to see if there were any further developments and decided that could wait until I had called on my pal, Rudy Frieden.

The offices of Rudolf Frieden, Incorporated take up two whole floors of a good-sized office building, which is not surprising since Rudy handles more than his share of the top cream in the entertainment field. There were perhaps half a dozen people who could get past the battery of secretaries and walk into his office unannounced. I happened to be one of them.

He was in a characteristic position, his plump body twisted in the swivel chair, a fat, expensively tailored knee resting against the edge of the desk, foot dangling. His right arm was twisted around behind his head, right hand grasping left ear. The other hand dawdled a cigarette in a long holder in the ash tray. He was staring at it abstractedly.

Seated across from him was a colored, chubby character whom I recognized. He was Lonnie Swift, for my money the best trumpet player in the business, always excepting Satch'mouf Louis, himself. Lonnie saw me first, grinned widely and raised his hands with exaggerated fright.

"Look out! Heah come dat lawman!" Rudy swivelled around and drawled: "Hi, Chuck. Come on in."

I said: "I don't want to break up a

conference. I just want to get a little information."

Lonnie started to get up. "I got to be going. See you gates later."

I said: "Stick around, Lonnie. Maybe you can help." I turned back to Rudy. "What's your opinion of Jeanne Barre?"

Rudy looked at me questioningly. "You mean professionally or otherwise?"

"Is there any 'otherwise'?"

Rudy shook his head, "Not that I know of. I've heard her sing. I think she's good." He turned to Lonnie for confirmation.

Lonnie grinned. "She's solid, man. She's right in there. First white girl I ever heard could sing real New Orleans. She's got it real good."

I turned to Rudy, "Would you like to handle her?"

He shrugged. "If she were free. Jock Shields is handling her, isn't he?" "Yeah."

"She thinking about making a change?"

"When Shields took her on, he was dumb enough to borrow promotion money from a bad actor. The backer is getting ready to take his cut and more as soon as she gets on her feet in Hollywood." I eyed Rudy. "I don't like Shields, personally. I was just wondering if there was any way I could bust the contract, throw Shields to the backer and get Barre a new deal all around."

"That's not nice," Rudy said mildly.

"Who's the backer?" "Abe Sengler."

Lonnie got to his feet. "Well, I got to be going. Nice to see you gents.

I said: "What's the matter?"

Lonnie grinned but his chocolate complexion had turned several shades lighter. "You're getting on a subject where I don't know nothing and I don't want to know nothing. We been seeing more and more of Abe's ugly boys up in Harlem the past few years and it's not good." He shook his head. "There's a real bad man with a mean eye and I got my share of troubles already. Fil be shovin' along. Thanks for the info, Rudy." Rudy nodded slowly and Lonnie grinned at me. "Come up to Harlem and see us sometime, lawman, and we'll play you some real purty music."

I grinned and nodded. "I'll do that, Lonnie." He went out and I turned back to Rudy. "I didn't know Abe had spread out that far."

Rudy shrugged.

"If I could swing it, would you handle Jeanne Barre?"

He shook his head. "I don't go for throwing Shields to Sengler's wolves. If he got himself or his client mixed up with Sengler, he's dumber than I thought but there's no law against being dumb. Anyway, it may work out all right. Jeanne Barre is not the first kid to get a little backing from somebody she'd rather not mention. Don't misunderstand me." Rudy went on slowly, "I've got no reason to be afraid of people like Sengler. I stay clear of them and they let me alone. Some of them, heaven help me, even call themselves my friends. But chiseling another agent's talent is a different proposition. Even if I wanted to go against what ethics we've managed to build up in this racket. I'd be crazy to pull a stunt like that. It would make me fair game for everybody, no holds barred. All the agents in the business would move in on me like a school of sharks."

I laughed. "My money would be on

Rudy shrugged.

I said: "Can you think of any way I can get at Sengler's contract?"

Rudy looked shocked. "He's actually got her name on a contract?"

"So she says."

He shook his head. "There's nothing she can do without hurting herself except try to buy the contract back. And under the circumstances, I doubt if Sengler would sell."

I got up. "He won't."

"You've talked to him?"

"I saw him this morning."
"What did he sav?"

"He threw me out."

Rudy grinned and examined me carefully. "No bruises showing. He must have chloroformed you first."

"Didn't you know?" I asked gravely. "Conrad doesn't go in for rough stuff any more. I'm handling this one with subtlety and finesse."

His expression was openly doubting and worried. "For Pete's sake, Chuck, don't get into any arguments with Sengler's gunsels. There are too many dark alleys in this town."

"Thanks for the advice."

"And let me know if there's anything I can do."

I nodded and opened the door.

"You don't have to rush off, do you, Chuck?"

"I've got to hurry back to my office," I snarled, "and write 'I will only drink milk and never go out after dark,' a thousand times before supper." I closed the door on his laughter.

UZY was remaking her lips and preparing to depart for the day when I got back. I said: "Anything new?"

She peered up at me over her compact. "I might as well be Robinson Crusoe. There hasn't been a human being in this office since you left except the mailman."

"Any calls?"

"Some strange man calls up on the hour every hour and wants to know if you've come in yet."

"Shields?"

She leered at me. "I'd know his voice."

I snorted and went back to my office, threw myself in the chair and stared morosely out the window.

Suzy came to the door tugging at a bit of feather and felt she called a hat. "Are you going to stay a while?"

I nodded. "Go on home. I'm going to stick around and practice humility."

"Anything wrong?" She asked concernedly.

I shook my head. "I was joking. I've got a problem to worry around." "Can Suzy help?"

"Can Suzy help?"

"No. It just needs thinking out. I'm too lazy to enjoy thinking." She smiled down at me. "You do

seem to have concentrated more on strong-arm stuff lately."

"This one is going to be different," I swore. "If there's going to be any mayhem, the other guy will have to do it—"

The telephone rang. I picked up the receiver and looked at my watch. Five o'clock on the nose.

"Conrad?"

"Yeah."

Suzy looked at me inquiringly. I shook my head and waved her out the door. She tiptoed out closing the door behind her. The voice said: "You read the papers today?"

"Yeah. Who is this?"

"You read about a girl?"

I said: "Yeah, Doc, it was too bad. I liked Veronica."

There was a pause and the voice choked: "Would you know anything about what happened, Conrad?"

"I would not. I was going to play ball. Didn't she tell you?"

oall. Didn't she tell you: "What's that?"

"Didn't you talk to her after I saw her last night?"

Doc hesitated, then blurted out: "She called from a pay station and told me you seemed like a right guy and that everything was fixed. That was the last I knew until I seen the papers."

"Look, Doc, I'll make a deal with you. You give me what you've got and I'll help you try to run down her killer."

I knew what would happen next. There would be a pause and then Doc would realize he couldn't be sure I hadn't killed her. He would then think about the money I might still pay for his "proof." Fear would grapple with cupidity and cupidity would win out.

Right on schedule, the words whined out: "Look, Conrad, I'm down to my last buck and I've got to get out of town and rest up a while. If you're ready to pay the five G's for what I've got, maybe we can make a deal. Later, after I get back on my feet, we can get together on running down the rat who killed Veronica."

I kept my voice steady and tried not to think what I was thinking. "Where do I meet you?"

"You'll pay? You got the money?"

"What do you think I'm talking about? Stop stalling."

Doc paused fearfully. This might be his last chance to jump town safely. "You know where Byrne Street is?"

"I can find it. What's the address?"

"217, on the right hand side on the second floor."

"I'll be there in half an hour," I said.

### CHAPTER FOUR

#### Death Ride

YRNE Street was a dead end in an advanced stage of decay. I paid off the cab driver on the corner and walked the half block to 217. It turned out to be a tired four-family frame dwelling of two stories next to a vacant lot. The hallway smelled of fried food and human beings, reminders that when you sink below a certain level you

have neither the interest nor the cash for such frivolities as cleanliness and varied diets. I climbed the narrow stairway, turned right and read the solied pasteboard tacked to the doorframe, "Mr. and Mrs. James Klavin." The door cracked open and an eye peered at me through the opening. Down at waist level, a smaller, black eye of a Colt barrel aimed at my belt buckle. I said: "Broe?"

The door opened wide enough for me to come in. Doc Klavin shut the door and leaned his back against it, the gun still pointing at me. Medium height, slender, sandy hair, pale blue eyes. He looked soft but not unhealthy. However, the slack mouth and weak chin indicated that the very thought of steady work would be enough to upset Doc's digestion permanently.

There was only one bulb working in the overhead light and Doc had supplemented it by turning on the light in the bathroom and leaving the door open. The furniture was ratty and cheap. A suitcase was open and packed on one end of the sofa. A heap of feminine clothing was piled on the other end. Doc wasn't overlooking any bets. I wondered how much he could get for all that remained of Veronica's worldly goods. I said: "Put away the rod, Doc. I've seen one before."

Doc spoke hoarsely. "Don't think I won't use it, Mack. Don't think I won't."

I kept my hands in sight and shrugged. "O.K., so you'll use it." I crossed, opened the door to the living room closet and closed it. I poked my head in the kitchen, crossed the living room again, went through the bathroom and turned on the light in the bedroom. I peered under the bed, opened the closet door. Doe followed me around suspiciously.

"What do you think you're doing?"

"I just want to know what I'm up against." I turned off the light and walked back to the living room. "All right. Doc, what have you got to sell?" "Let's see the color of your dough."

"Look, Junior, if you've got something that's worth five grand, you'll get your dough. We're supposed to be leveling with each other, remember? I didn't have to come in nice and easy and let you throw a gun down on me. There were other ways to play it."

He eyed me calculatingly. "I can take it away from you if I have to."

I sneered at him. "You're cutting yourself in on a big game, Doc. Try to like you know the rules. If you've got something, we'll pay for it. If you're running a bluff I'm going to let you down easy, not because I like you, but because I think maybe Veronica would have liked to see you get a break. Things could happen to you."

"You talk tough for a guy on the wrong end of a gun."

"There are other guns in New York, Doc. Guns with long barrels. Smart guns that can reach into whatever hole you try to crawl. Get some sense."

Slowly he lowered the gun to his side.

"I'm not running a bluff." He put his
free hand inside his shirt and took out
an envelope. He kept his eyes on me,
opened the flap and slid out two negatives and two prints. He put the negatives and one of the prints back, tossed
the other one to me and the gun came
up again. He grinned. "Prints, and negatives to back 'em up. Is that worth five
grand or ain't it?"

I looked at the picture. The development was poor and the faces were hard to distinguish. Two figures sitting at a table. I went toward the brighter light in the bathroom and held the posteardsize print up to the light. Doe remained in the center of the living room, grinning sardonically and holding the gun on me. I barely registered the sharp crash and tinkling of broken glass.

I jerked my head around and got a momentary glimpse of Doe staring blankly at the short length of pipe at his feet. His face hardened and he sidled toward the living room window as I made a mad scrambling dive for the iron bathub and tried to claw my way through the bottom of it. All hell broke loose as the explosion tore at my ear druns, furniture dissolved into kindling and chunks of plaster rained down on me.

I stayed down until I was sure the rafters weren't going to give, climbed out of the bathtub and went into what was left of the living room with my ears still ringing. Plaster dust and bits of cotton padding whirled and eddied about the room. The overhead bulb had burst and I made my way through the debris by the light from the bathroom glowing dimly through the settling dust-cloud. Plaster was ripped out of the walls and ceiling and the wooden laths stood out like torn and twisted ribs. The cheap furniture would never be used for anything but firewood.

Doc lay in a corner against the wall. The blast had caught him from behind and there was an ugly smear where his body had smashed into the wall. His health would never bother him again. Doc had gone where Veronica would be waiting to take care of him. I swallowed the rising nausea and rolled him over gingerly. The envelope was still inside his shirt, the negatives and print crumpled but undamaged. I wiped the blood off on his trouser leg and pocketed the envelope.

By propping my foot against the wall and yanking on the knob, I managed to get the front door open in spite of the buckled frame. The door across the hall hadn't opened and there was no name in the slot. On the first floop both doors were cracked open and many eyes were glued to the cracks. A bent old fellow of seventy stood trembling in the hallway.

"What was it?" he quavered.

"Looks like a gas explosion," I said.
"I was just passing by. There's a fellow
up there badly hurt. You better call the
ambulance."

He wavered uncertainly, more questions written on his old face.

I said: "Better hop to it, Pop, he may be dying. I'm going out to get the cop on the beat."

He turned away, pushed open the door, bowling aside two women and a covey of kids in the process. "Hurry, Mary! The hospital! Mr. Klavin is dying from a gas explosion!"

I hurried out of the building. I was just as glad he hadn't suggested calling the cops at the same time he called the hospital. I had a couple of people to see before I was ready to talk to the police.

WALKED half a mile before 1 hailed a passing taxi and headed for the office. I had plenty of time in the cab to examine the photographs. The negatives were practically identical and there was a print of each one. The pictures were the sort taken by a roving nightclub photographer, much beloved by tourists. The two people in the picture were not tourists and they were not aware that a picture was being taken. Jeanne Barre, younger and with a different hair-do, sat at a nightclub table, her hand resting on her companion's arm, talking earnestly to him. Her companion was the late unlamented Mike Glasgow.

I paid off the driver in front of the building and then changed my mind about going up to the office. I walked down the side street to the taxi stand and spotted the mighty mite, Barney Aarons, in the center of the knot of drivers on the sidewalk. He was fortytwo and looked any age at all. A dark, sallow little man with a face that could be gone over with a wire brush and still look like it needed washing. He was smart and tough as a steel trap and made a career of knocking chips off shoulders. When he saw me he broke off his lecture and demanded proprietarily: "Where we going, Chuck?"

"Can you tear yourself away?"

"Abhh!" He waved a hand, dismissing the rabble. He threw open the door
of his cab, slammed it shut after me
and climbed into the driver's seat. This
door-opening courtesy always surprised
me and reminded me that I stood in
Barney's good graces. I said: "Beekman Place. You know where Jeanne
Barre's apartment is?"

Barney nodded and did a U-turn at the next intersection to the loudly vocal protests of other drivers.

The early evening traffic was bad and Barney crawled along, muttering under his breath. We were off the beat and had to stop at the first traffic light. Barney crawled another block, jumped the light on the caution signal and crawled again.

It happened at the third light.

We were behind a Model-A who couldn't make up his mind whether to stop or go when the light flashed red and made up his mind for him. Barney slammed on the brakes, vanked on the handbrake, and described the Model-A driver's ancestors in lurid detail. We skidded to a stop and nuzzled the rear bumper ahead. Barney stuck his head out the window and began making driving suggestions interspersed with comments on the possibility of incest in the offending driver's family. I leaned back and grinned-into the muzzle of a .45 coming into the open door of the cab. I was seated on the outside behind Barney. The door on my side opened and a second man told me to move my damn knees. I moved them.

I had never seen either one of them before. Both were well-dressed and welltanned. Whether the latter was from the sun or the barbershop lamp, I didn't know. It didn't seem to be very important. The one with the gun was thin and high-cheeked and sat away from me on the corner of the seat. A saturnine face with dcep-set, Indian-black eves, he kept the .45 fanning in a little arc between me and Barney. The chunky one in the flannel suit pulled down the jump seat behind Barney and twisted around to watch him. The light changed and the cab moved forward. I looked at Barnev's open-mouthed face in the mirror and shrugged.

Barney said: "What's up, guys? The cab's taken."



Flannel-suit grinned. "Yeah, we just took it." He pulled a 32 out of a shoulder rig and poked it behind Barney's ear. "You know what this is, don't you chum?"

Barney nodded vigorously.

"Then don't get any ideas. We're going to Central Park and we're in kind of a rush. Get it?"

Barney nodded resignedly, "I got you, boss."

Black-eyes waved his gun at me.
"Frisk him."

Flannel-suit holstered his gun and relieved me of mine, tossed it to Blackeyes. Then he found the envelope. "Well! Well! Pictures, by golly! Very

interesting. Get a load of these, Ernie!" Ernie got a load of those and Flannel-suit unearthed my wallet. He looked over the contents, exclaimed in mock amazement. "Charles 'Chuck' Conrad is a private investigator! It's a fact, Ernie! Says so right here!" He waved the wallet. He was having himself a helluva time. He chuckled, reached into the wallet and extracted almost two hundred dollars in bills. "You won't be needing this, Charles 'Chuck' Conrad." He tossed the empty wallet into my lap, took out his own and proceeded to stow away the money. He held it away from me but not before I glimpsed the name "Thompson" through the celluloid card holder. He rammed the wallet down in his hip pocket and grinned fatuously at me. "Tell me, do the girls really call you 'Chuck,' Chuck?"

I turned to Ernie who seemed to be the boss. "Speaking of girls, isn't it kind of risky going to Central Park two nights in a row?"

Ernie grinned dryly. "We'll try to pick a different spot for you."

I sighed. "Too bad you didn't get what you wanted from Veronica. It would have saved everybody a lot of trouble." Ernie shrugged.

I asked: "Where did you learn the explosives racket?"

"In night school. You ask too many

questions, shamus."
"I am a very curious guy. Did I lead

you to Doc Klavin?"
Without warning, Thompson brought

up a short uppercut that laid my head back on the seat. "Don't talk so much."

Ernie shrugged. "We were watching the street. We hadn't made the house. You led us to it." He grinned. "Good thing your subway accident wasn't fatal."

I was puzzled. "You guys?"

Ernie nodded at Thompson, "Him. He gets clumsy sometimes when he's in a hurry. I waited outside with the redhead." He eyed me. "The trouble some people won't go to," he said softly. "It's a kick. It really is a kick."

I said: "I could use a laugh."

Ernie said: "We're following the redhead for two days, trying to get a line on her boyfriend. We lose her twice on Byrne Street and never make the gee. She tails you to Joe's and we tail her. We know you're not her guy and we don't think you've got an angle. But you might get in the way so, just to make sure, we give you a little shove. Lucky for us it don't take and you lead us to Klavin's hideout. We give it to Klavin and you get away again. It's getting monotonous. We call in to Number One and what do you think he tells us?"

I shrugged. "He tells you that Conrad has moved into first place as the target for tonight."

Ernie nodded. "And that's enough talk," he said with finality. "You can talk all you want in a few minutes."

Thompson grinned. "Yeah, we'll even help you." Suddenly he whirled in the seat. "Where the hell are you taking us. cabby?" Barney's shoulders shrugged expressively. "You said Central Park, dincha?"

"This ain't the way to Central Park."
"I'm avoiding traffic, if you wanna know."

"I told you to take the shortest way." Barney leaned his head back and spoke out of the corner of his mouth. "Listen, mister. All I wanna do is get you where you're going as fast as I can and get rid of you." He raised his shoulders gloomily, "Maybe you're gonna roll me for my dough and take the cab. Maybe you're even gonna bump me and the chump. But I don't think you're gonna do anything to me because you look like reasonable guys. I never saw the chump before and you got no idea how quick I forget a couple of fares once they get out of the cab. I am a noivous guy and guns make me very unhappy. So if it's O.K. with you, I'll drive the

left turn sharply and began to bump down a dark cobblestone street. Ernie signaled to Thompson and grinned with pretended affability. "He's heading right. Leave him alone."

hack my own way." He took another

Thompson caught the signal and chuckled. He reached through the opening and slapped Barney on the shoulder. "You're O.K., hackie. We'll treat you nice."

HROUGH the mirror Barney caught my attention and his right eyelid drooped. He began to drive with his right hand, apparently scratching his leg with his left. Thompson didn't miss the motion. He stuck his head across the back of the seat. "What's wrong with you?"

"I got fleas!"

Suddenly the cab shot forward, bumped two wheels onto the curb, and at the same instant, Barney's left hand holding a lug wrench swung up and thudded against Thompson's skull. Thompson went down in the seat and I dove for the .45. Ernie had swung onto Barney. The cab stopped with a ierk on the sidewalk and we went forward and wrestled to the floor. I grappled for the gun with both hands while Ernie slugged at my face with his left, The rear door swung open and Barney, not having enough room to swing the wrench, grabbed Ernie around the neck and tugged. Then Ernie got the idea I was afraid he'd get. He reached swiftly, transferred the gun to his free left hand. I got my knee under him and kicked. The slug tore through the roof and Ernie went out of the cab backwards. The pint-sized hackie slammed the wrench down on his gun wrist and the gun went spinning. I was half out of the cab and didn't have a chance to turn back for Thompson's .32. Ernie still had my gun in his pocket and was tugging at it.

I dove for the gun on the pavement and Barney threw the wrench at Ernie who had my gun out as I came up on elbow with his. Ducking that wrench wrote finis for Ernie. His bullet bounced off the sidewalk as mine tore through his chest. I lay where I was, watched him arch his back, gasp for air he'd never breathe. I got slowly to my feet, shaking as though I had the ague.

There was a sound of running feet and Barney let out a yell. I looked up to see Thompson streaking past the darkened store fronts on the other side of the street. I lifted the gun and aimed. The gun danced around like a semaphore and I had to hang on tight to keep it from flying away. I lowered it and watched Thompson duck around the corner. I couldn't have hit the proverbial barn if I had been locked inside. I had the shakes but bad.

I knelt and fumbled through Ernie's pockets. He was smarter than Thompson. Except for my pictures there wasn't a thing on him except four hundred and eighty dollars and some change loose in a pant's pocket. I pocketed the amount Thompson had stolen from me and shoved the rest back into his pocket. I holstered my own gun and looked down at the exaggerated, sporty cut of Ernie's suit.

Barney said: "What now, Chuck? The cops?"

I threw Ernie's gun into the cab and shook my head, "Let's go places. Will that junk of yours still run?"

"Hell, yes, it'll run. What kind of a lousy driver do you think I am?" He looked down at the corpse. "What about him? Hadn't we better—"

"Not yet. Let's go."

Barney turned back to the cab.
"You're supposed to know the law." We
piled in the cab and backed into the
street. Barney addressed the rear-view
mirror. "Beekman Place, wasn't it?"

"I've changed my mind. Go to the Aladdin Hotel."

Aladdin Hotel."

Barney jumped. "Jeez, Chuck, you

ain't going to call on Abe Sengler?"

I nodded. "As soon as you let me
out, go to the nearest phone, call Lieutenant Kondos personally and tell him
about the gunsel back there. Tell him
the one who got away was named
Thompson. Don't mention the Aladdin.
I'll take care of that myself. After
you've talked to Kondos, come back and
wait. If I'm not out in twenty minutes,
call the cops again. Don't do anything
dumb like coming in after me."

Barney's face in the mirror was sick. "It ain't smart, Chuck."

"If you don't want to come along, I'll get out and grab another cab."

"Who said anything about quitting?"
Barney snarled, and the cab leaped forward

I rode the elevator to the top floor and walked down the hall to Sengler's suite. The door to the antercom was unlocked. Four men sat around a card table engrossed in the inevitable gin rummy. A fifth, a cocky-looking youngster with a crew haircut dangled a leg over the arm of the sofa and read a newspaper. He got up and came toward me. The card players glanced up incuriously and went back to their game.

I jerked a thumb toward the offices. "Louis still in there?"

Crew-cut nodded. "Ain't you the shamus that was around here this morning?"

I nodded.

"Louis said to throw you out if you came around again."

I moved through the second room toward the offices. "We'll ask him."

Crew-cut shrugged, followed me in, went to the voice box resting on the table and flipped the switch. "Louis, that shamus is back again. You want to see him, or shall I throw him out?"

A stream of profanity emerged from the box.

I grinned, cut off the flow of colorful prose and bent close to the speaker. "I've been thinking about you, Louis. I've been remembering how you lost your appetite for barbecued meat a few years ago." I paused. "Frying is much worse, Louis, especially when you're the one who's being cooked. Open that door like a good boy or, so help me, I'll see that the State of New York makes you into a Blue Plate Special.

I raised the switch and there was another stream of profanity. I cut it off and grinned at Crew-cut. "He loves me." I walked over and banged on the door, half expecting nothing to happen. Crew-cut stared at me perplexedly, unable to decide whether to throw me out or not.

The buzzer sounded and I pushed through before Louis could change his mind. I let the door swing to and lock and stood with my back to it. Louis the Watchdog was in the office alone. He threw down his racing form and came toward me.

"You're getting in my hair, guy. What are you trying to do, get your name inna papers?"

"I want to talk to Abe."

"I want to talk to Abe."

"The Boss ain't receiving. You'll talk

to me and it better be good."

"You're not bright enough, Louis. Tell Abe I want in."

"Listen, punk, the Boss tries to be nice. He shouldda broken your head this morning."

"I'll still talk to Abe."

"You got anything to say you'll spill it to me right now or I'll kick you all the way down to the street, personally." I said: "You going to tell him I'm

here?"

He grinned and came forward.

I did just what the books tell you not to do and it worked fine.

I led with my right and smacked him in the mush before he got set. He staggered and started to go down and I had to hold him up while I slammed two hard lefts into his belly. I let go and he crumpled softly to the floor and raised his head dazedly. I unlimbered the .38 and rapped him smartly behind the ear. His head banged the carpet and stayed there.

There were two intercom boxes on Louis' desk. I checked the wiring and discovered that one led to Abe's office alone. I happily ripped out the wiring on the other one, dragged Louis behind the desk and flipped the switch on the intercom to Abe's office. His soft bass voice came in.

"Yeah?"

I made my voice a gravelly imitation of Louis, "Louis, boss. Can I come in?" Abe grunted and cut off the connec-

Abe grunted and cut off the connection. The buzzer sounded and I moved fast, following my .38 right on through the door.

#### CHAPTER FIVE

#### Coward's Rap

LEANED back against the slowly closing door until it locked. "Hello, Abe. Hands on the desk."

Abe put down the fountain pen and spread his hands on the open ledger in front of him. His face were that 'perpetual half-smile and his eyes glittered with intentness and curiosity. I knew he was thinking about what he was going to do to me when the tables were reversed.

"What do you want, screwball?"

"I've come for Jeanne Barre's contract, Abe."

"You must be nuts." His voice was liquid soft.

"You and I have got something in common, Abe. Neither one of us likes to be pushed around. Open that safe."

His lips parted in a grimace of a smile and he shook his head slowly from side to side. Then his hand inched back toward the edge of the desk. I leaned forward and slammed the gun barrel against the side of his jaw. His head jerked back and I raked the other cheek.

"You think I'm kidding?"

Blood trickled out of the corner of his mouth. His head bowed forward, came up slowly and his eyes tried to avoid mine. Suddenly his thick lips quivered and a whimper began deep in his throat. His hands opened and closed spasmodically and I finally pinned his eyes with mine.

I stared at him incredulously. Abe Sengler was yellow!

I regarded him silently. Somewhere over the years, the iron must have gone out of his guts. A man didn't get where Abe Sengler was by being afraid of his own shadow. But for a long time nobody had entertained the idea of challenging the Big Boy and he hadn't had

anything to face up to. He had grown fat and soft and was afraid to lose. I grinned. Maybe he was even thinking what a dose of his own medicine would taste like. He was alone with me in this locked room and he didn't like it. I gestured toward the safe.

"Open up!"

Abe got up like a sleepwalker, webbled over to the safe and dropped to one knee. I stood over him and watched. His hands trembled as they twisted at the dial. Blood dripped down his chin, a drop fell on the extended cuff of a white shirtsleeve. He stared fascinated at the little blob, looked at me fearfully, wiped his face on his coatsleeve and swung open the safe door.

He reached inside, opened a drawer, took out a batch of folded papers, opened one, tossed it aside, opened another, stood up and handed it to me. It was a single sheet of paper, a book-keeping balance sheet folded to it and a smaller sheet with a few lines of hand-writing and a signature clipped to the back of it. I moved over to the front of the desk and held the papers down to the desk light.

I barely noticed Abe as he sidled back into the chair behind the desk. His nerve was gone and I didn't think he'd have the courage to pull a trigger even if he had a gun in his hand, which he hadn't. He put his hands back on the top of the desk. I read everything and looked at Abe in surprise. He was grinning weakly as the door banged open behind me. He rose out of his chair.

I realized what had happened. The mechanism for that door buzzer was on the other side of the door and couldn't be heard in this soundproof room. All through our little tete-a-tete Abe had probably kept his knee against the button on the under side of the desk. When Louis hadn't answered he thought he was licked. He had pressed again in a last-ditch hope and unfortunately Louis had come to—because he was standing in the doorway, beginning to throw lead.

I used the edge of the desk to propel myself downward like a pearl diver. The slug intended for the middle of my back knocked my hat off. My snap shot caught Louis in the lower side. His face blanched and the gun dropped out of his hand.

Even as I scrambled to my feet I wondered what the hell went on around here. I knew damn well Louis hadn't lost his nerve, too. The slug I had put into his side wasn't by any means fatal. Louis' hand dropped and he rubbed his side absently. His mouth hung open and he wasn't even looking at me.

He was staring at the little round hole his Smith & Wesson had made in the center of Abe Sengler's forehead. Blood oozed around the hole and a tiny rivulet trickled down beside the nose and joined the dribble on his chin. Abe was still wearing that half-smile, staring intently, curiously. straight at Louis Blinehok.

Louis sobbed, tried stupidly to explain to Abe. "A mistake, Boss! I didn't mean to do it!"

But Abe couldn't hear and I wasn't interested. I chopped down hard with the .38 in the same spot behind the right ear. Louis went down easier this time.

I made sure the door was locked, picked up my hat and pocketed the contract and got on the phone to head-quarters. I was lucky. Kondos hadn't gone personally to look at my late pal, Ernie. I told him what had happened and apologized because I wasn't going to be around to greet him when he got here. He ordered me to wait for him. I said I was sorry, reminded him to bring a blowtorch for the doors and hung up fast. I knew he was going to try to get here before I could get away.

I bent over Louis, decided he'd keep at least a half hour this time and went out and pulled on the door until I heard the lock click into place. I holstered my gun, straightened my tie and pinched my hat so the bullet hole wouldn't show and pulled open the outer door.

The boys were still at their card game and Crew-cut was working the crossword puzzle in the newspaper. I looked at my watch. Exactly twelve minutes since I had entered through this door. Crew-cut looked up. I winked at him, turned and stuck my head back around the door. "I left one of my business cards on your desk, Louis. If anybody steals your rod, give me a call." I pulled the door shut quickly, heard the lock catch and grinned at Crew-cut. He grinned back, looked at the closed door significantly and put a thumb and forefinger delicately to his nose. I nodded and let myself out into the corridor. As soon as I closed the door I lit out for the stairs. That elevator would have had to snap its cable to beat me to the lobby.

Barney was just starting out of the cab as I dashed out to the sidewalk. I saw the nose of the lug wrench poking out of his half-zipped jacket. I grinned and dove into the back seat of the cab. "Now we can take that Beekman Place address. It's almost time to relax."

RANG the bell and Jeanne Barre came to the door herself. She was dressed for the street and she had a hat on. She seemed surprised to see me.

"Mr. Conrad! How nice! I hope you don't have bad news for me so soon?"

I shook my head wearily and walked into the room. It was a nice roomwarm colors, comfortable furniture, feminine but without any dust-catching gimeracks to offend the eye or snag the unwary elbow. It suited its occupant's personality. I said: "Were you going out or coming in?"

"I've been out to dinner with Jock. He's in the kitchen. Can he fix you a drink?"

"I could use a bourbon and water. Strong, huh?"

Jeanne went to the connecting door.
"Jock, Mr. Conrad is here. Fix him a
bourbon and water. He likes it strong."

I waited until she came back and seated herself on the sofa. I sat down in a barrel-shaped chair that was more comfortable than it looked and stared at her. She flushed.

"Do you have any news for me, Mr. Conrad—Chuck? What shall I call you?"

I said: "You can whistle if you want to. I'll know who you mean." I hoped my voice wasn't as rocky as I felt. "And, yes, I have news for you."

She smiled at the first, sat up straight at the last. "Good or bad?" She whispered.

I said: "When do you have to be at the Raspail?"

She frowned. "I don't go on the first time until nine-fifteen. I was just going to change when you came in."

Jock Shields came in with a tray of three highballs. He smiled cordially. "Hello, Conrad. No hard feelings about this morning, I hope."

I shook my head and he handed Jeanne her drink. I accepted my drink from the tray and Jock sat beside Jeanne. I looked at her.

"In answer to your question—it all depends on how you look at it."

"What do you mean?"

I cocked my hand at her. "You didn't tell me all there was to know last night." Slowly a flush crept up her cheeks.

I said: "For instance, you didn't point out the coincidence between Mike Glasgow's death one night and a visit from Abe Sengler the following night. You gave me a reason for not knowing any-thing about that contract with Sengler and Jock had his reason for not bringing it up. But nabody offered a reason why, over a period of five years, Abe Sengler never tried to arrange a closer contact with his investment. And Abe has a reputation for staying pretty close to a dollar."

Jeanne's hand moved up to her throat in a protecting motion. "What are you driving at?" she whispered.

I frowned. "I'm not sure exactly, but it ought to read something like this. Last night you were interested in a detailed description of Mike's character. We agreed that he was tough and unpredictable. A man who, if he hated somebody enough, would be perfectly willing to die himself if he could only kill that somebody. When you think about it for a minute, you realize that a man like Mike is the only type of man that Abe Sengler, with his powerful organization behind him, would be afraid of.

"Now, it gets simpler. I was lucky enough to take Mike Glasgow. You hired me. It almost looks like you were sending in a replacement, doesn't it?"

"Just a minute, Conrad," Shields interposed, "are you saying that—" he paused and threw up his hands hopelessly.

"Go on," I invited.

"You go on," he said, "it gets more amusing by the minute."

"Then let's laugh some more." I said.
"Abe Sengler was afraid of Mike Glasgow. Miss Barre had a hold over Mike
Glasgow. Abe was permitted to put up
the money for Miss Barre's career and
get a return on his investment. But as
long as Mike was alive, Abe wasn't permitted to go near her."

"How can you know all that?" Jeanne Barre gasped. Shields looked at her sharply.

I pulled out the envelope with the negatives and pictures and tossed it in her lap. "I don't do it with mirrors."

Jeanne put her drink down on the coffee table and took the pictures out of the envelope. She gasped, her hand flew to her mouth and her eyes filled with tears. I said: "You've seen 'em before?" She shook her head distractedly. Jock took the other picture out of her lap, looked at it and looked up at me. "Where did you get these?"

"I asked Miss Barre a question."

"She doesn't have to answer it."

"No, Jock." She put a hand on his knee and eyed me defiantly. "Mike Glasgow was my brother."

I hadn't expected that. I said: "That's crazy. Mike Glasgow was an orphan. He didn't have any brothers or sisters." She shook her head. "Mike ran away from home when he was twelve. And Mom and Dad were killed in a grade-crossing six months later. I was only seven at the time and I went to live with Dad's cousins in New Orleans."

"But you kept in touch with Mike."

"I never saw him from the time I was seven until he came back to my dressing room at the Green Wheel five years ago and told me who he was—that he was my brother, I mean. I didn't know that he was Mike Glasgow until I saw his picture in the paper a week ago.

"After that first night, he came back twice and I went over to his table and sat with him. On the third visit he told me that he wouldn't be seeing me for a while. We had never talked about anything but the career I hoped I'd have and I felt so ashamed of myself because I thought he was being drafted. He didn't deny it but he wouldn't talk about it. Now of course I know it wann't true. But that night he pretended to have a secret and said he'd done me a favor. I didn't realize what the favor was until shortly before I asked you to come and see me."

"What was the favor?"

"Just what you said. He had probably talked Abe Sengler into putting up the money for my career without letting Abe know our relationship. Abe undoubtedly thought I was Mike's girl and kept hands off, either through fear or friendship. I decided it was fear and you were right in guessing that I wanted to "replace" Mike with a man who had some of his qualities-but an honest man this time. Maybe you think it was cold-blooded of me to choose the man who was responsible for Mike's death, but I had no love for the adult Mike Glasgow. He was vicious and he got what he deserved. I choose to remember the unruly, likeable country boy, Mike Barre, before he got off on the wrong trail." She looked down at the picture. "These must have been taken the night I thought Mike was going to be drafted-" She looked up suddenly. "Jock! That girl on the telephone! Remember?"

Shields looked startled. "Jove! That's right!"

EANNE turned to me. "A girl called me the night after Mike was captured and said she had evidence that I was Mike's real girl friend, not the Rhine woman. She

wanted me to pay her five thousand dollars. I knew there might be danger of connecting my name with Mike's but I didn't see how she could have any proof. I hung up in her face and when she called again, Jock got rid of her quickly."

I said: "She won't bother you any more—or her boyfriend either. They're dead."

Jeanne held the picture up. "These
-you didn't! No!"

I shook my head. "No, I didn't kill them."

Jeanne drooped dispiritedly. "Sengler. It's an example of what I can expect, too."

I said: "Sengler won't bother you any more either. He's dead, too." Both of them stared at me open-mouthed. I pulled out the contract and handed it to her. "Here's what you hired me to get."

She held it on the tips of her fingers and read it through carefully. She turned to Shields, smiling through her tears. "Jock, it's all over! We're free! We're free!"

"Not we," I said gently. I handed her the balance sheet and the half-sheet of handwriting. "That bookkeeping sheet is Sengler's record of the money advanced to you. Each item has been initialed by your agent. That other

(Continued on page 128)



I reached Selak just as he tossed George Herro over the edge of the balcony.

T had been a slow winter. Cleaning and repairing had kept us going, but there isn't the money in cleaning that there used to be. Not if you've got any respect for rugs and if you clean them the real Armenian way.

It was spring and the door to the store was open. The shop was bright with color. In the window we had an eighteen foot Sarouk, a lovely piece with a sheen like silk—a floral design on a deep rose background. Usually, when Papa is unhappy he can get a lift out of just admiring a rug like that. But not today.

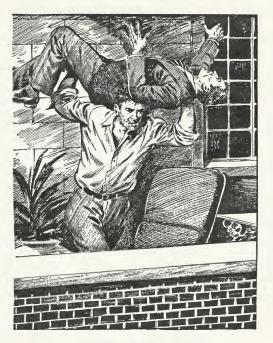
"Why," he said, "did I ever get into this business?"

Ever since I'd known him, Papa had asked himself that question. Even when business was good, he asked it. He didn't expect an answer.

I said: "The only thing wrong with this business is the people who are in it. It's your competitors who give you your gray hair, Papa."

"Competitors?" he said scornfully.





### By WILLIAM CAMPBELL GAULT

Cut-rate carpets were Kaprelian's business, but when an Oriental prayer-rug turned up with a corpse wrapped in it, that was more than he'd bargained for.

"Competitors—huh! I've got no competitors. Contemptoraries, I got."

petitors. Contemptoraries, I got."

"It's contemporaries," I corrected him.

He shook his head. "For them, I have nothing but contempt. They are my contemptoraries."

I started to laugh, and then an elderly couple walked into the store. The frown on Papa's face was re-

placed by a smile as he rose and came forward to greet them.

"Good morning" Pana said "A beau-

"Good morning," Papa said. "A beautiful morning, Mr. Egan."

Years ago, the Egans had been good customers. Then they'd had their entire house carpeted wall to wall, in the fashion of the time.

Mr. Egan said: "Good morning, Mr. Kaprelian. I'm surprised that you remember me,"

Papa's smile was beatific. "I never forget a friend," he said earnestly. To Papa, friend was synonymous with customer.

Mr. Egan looked faintly uncomfortable, "Our carpeting," he said, "is prity badly worn, Mr. Kaprelian. We're thinking of having the house done over. Frankly, it's a choice between re-carpeting and orientals. I wondered how prices were on orientals these days."

I knew Papa was wincing inside. But his face gave no indication of it. "Prices," he said, "have never been more favorable, Mr. Egan, Values have never been better." He called to me: "Levon, you will help me, please?"

To everybody I know, I'm Lee. To Papa, I'm still Levon. I went over to help him take down and spread some rugs.

I knew the pile he'd go to. Egan was shopping. Egan was buying on price and price alone. We had some very loosely woven Lilihans Papa had picked up as trade-ins. They'd been used less than a year, they were new you might say.

Name alone means only the locality,

you understand. There are good, bad and indifferent weavers in all localities. These Lilihans were not of the best, but they were good, serviceable rugs.

The trouble is, they looked pretty bad against that Sarouk in the window. The memory of that was still in the Egans' mind. I could tell.

The price Papa quoted them made me wince. He wanted this sale. He wanted the Egans back.

Mr. Egan's eyebrows went up. He was interested. But Mrs. Egan was frowning. I thought of saying something to her, but I never interfere when Papa's selling.

"Beautiful, aren't they?" Papa asked. Mr. Egan nodded. Mrs. Egan continued to frown. "I was wondering about the colors," she said doubtfully. "Our decorator tells me it's so hard to work a motif around an oriental rug."

Interior decorators . . From the painter, the paper-hanger, the furniture and drapery dealer they get a cut. But not from the oriental dealers. No rake-off, no recommendation from them.

"These colors are not bold," Papa said. "They will blend with anything."

"Perhaps." She didn't look like she believed it. "The decorator also says we should not spend all our money on the floor."

All their money would buy three medium-sized banks. But maybe being careful like that is why they had it.

Papa looked grave. "Let me suggest something, Mrs. Egan. Let me bring some rugs up to your house, some rugs I will personally choose. Leave them there for a week or two. Then you can make your decision."

"That seems fair enough," Mr. Egan said.

But Mrs. Egan shook her head. "I want to look at some carpeting, first, this morning. If I don't find what I want, I'll be in again."

Papa started to say something, but Mr. Egan beat him to it. "Isn't your cousin over on Broad Street selling carpeting in addition to orientals, Mr. Kaprelian?"

"I believe he is," Papa said.

Sarkis had been selling domestic carpeting for seven years and Papa knew it well. Every Sunday, Papa and Sarkis ate chicken and pilaff together. Every Sunday, they played tavlu. The rest of the week they were busy cutting each other's throats.

Mr. Egan smiled. "Well, we'll be back. I'll see that she comes back, Mr. Kaprelian."

Papa smiled and nodded, his eves sad.

E SAID nothing as I helped him pile the rugs back. For minutes after we'd finished, and he was back in his chair behind the desk, he said nothing.

Finally, he said: "Carpeting—" and shook his head.

"It covers the floor," I said. "It serves the same purpose."

He looked at me as though I'd uttered a sacrilege—which I had. "It covers the floor," he repeated. "It serves the same purpose."

I started to explain but he raised a hand. "We will pretend I am Rembrandt. We will pretend I have a fine, beautiful idea, and I get my brushes and my paint, and I work like a dog. I work weeks, maybe months—maybe longer, I don't know. When I finish, I have this beautiful picture, this work of art. The dealer says it is the best I have ever done. He puts it up, so people can look, so somebody can buy. The customers come in and admire it. It would look beautiful, they know, on their wall. Am I right?"

"Sure," I said, "but-"

He raised a hand to silence me. "No buts. It would be a credit to the wall.

Now—do they say, 'Well, I want to look at some wallpaper first. I'll be back if I can't get the right wallpaper?' Don't they both cover the wall?'

"Rembrandt is dead, Papa," I said.
"This is 1948."

"Both of these things I know. Have you some more things to say I don't know?"

"A Rembrandt is a work of art," I said.

"Oh. In the window, a Sarouk, a fine Sarouk. Maybe twenty-seven thousand knots to the square foot. Each knot is tied by hand. The finest wool is used, vegetable dye is used, care and cunning is used. This is not a work of art?"

"In a way," I admitted.

But Papa wasn't listening. He was rushing for the phone, "I forgot-" he said.

Now, he was calling Sarkis' number. Now, he had him on the wire.

"Sarkis, you're busy? No? Well, it's like this. One of my very best, one of my most loyal customers was in, a Mr. Egan and his wife. Old oriental customers but the wife has some idea she would like to try carpeting and they were going to Acme, you understand, to look at some. But I told them you had a finer selection, Sarkis. I told them you had more reasonable prices. Together, we could make a dollar or two on these customers of mine. Right, Sarkis?"

A silence while Sarkis answered.

Then: "Oh, you know they have carpeting now? You sold them the carpeting they have now? They are your customers, Sarkis? Listen, my cousin, when you are still living in a mud house in Sivas, I was selling rugs to Mr. Egan. Good-bye." He hung up the phone angrily.

"Is that true what you told him, Papa?" I asked. "I thought you and Sarkis came to this country at the same time." "I have been here some time when Sarkis arrived. A considerable time, Levon."

"How long?"

"Over a month." He went over to get his hat. "I am going to lunch." His face was stormy as he left.

I went into the back shop where Selak was washing rugs. Selak's a big boy, over two hundred pounds, with warm brown eyes and a timid smile. Selak's mind stopped growing when he was about nine, but he's kind and gentle. It's only his strength that scares you. He'd been with us for years.

"It's time to eat, Selak," I told him. He nodded and smiled.

I wouldn't have to tell him it was time to start again, after lunch. Selak's old-fashioned; he likes to work.

I waited until he had unwrapped his lunch and started to eat before I went into the front shop again. That's when I saw the vision.

I knew it was a vision because no girl could be that beautiful. No hair could be that golden, no eyes that blue. Nobody could wear simple green linen and still look like a queen. A slim, regal vision, standing right inside the doorway.

She was smiling, "I've been admiring that rug in the window."

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" I said. I hadn't moved since coming through the door. I just stood there, like some oaf, staring.

"It certainly is. It's a Sarouk, isn't

I came forward, now. We lived on the same plane for the moment. "It's a Sarouk," I agreed.

"I'm not sure it would go with my furnishings, though," she said doubtfully. "The place is almost too modern, if you know what I mean."

"Perhaps a Bokhara, or a Fereghan, then," I suggested. "They work in very well with modern decoration." "Perhaps—" she said. "I've a Bokhara now. I mean a real one. There's so much confusion about Bokharas, isn't there? The real ones are called Khiva, sometimes, or Afghanistan. This was really made in Bokhara."

"You've been reading a book," I said. Her laugh was music. "I have. For the past two weeks. You see, up until a year ago, I had no interest in orientals, at all. But a friend of mine died and left me these rugs. I kept them in storage until a month ago. But you're not interested in all this, are you?"

I wanted to tell her I was interested in anything she said. I said: "It's very interesting. It's possible you might have some very valuable rugs in the group."

Which was bad business, but I wasn't thinking about business.

"There's one," she said, "that could be valuable. It's an antique, I'm sure. I'd like to have you look at it."

"I'd be glad to," I said.

"This afternoon?" she asked, and handed me a card.

There was no reason why my legs should feel weak at that. She wanted an appraisal. Whatever I'd read into those two simple words hadn't been intentional on her part, I was sure.

"This afternoon," I agreed. "Would two-thirty be all right?"

"Two-thirty would be fine," she said. The smile again, and she was gone.

At the curb there was a Caddy convertible, and I watched her climb into that. I watched it until it disappeared up the street.

Papa would be unhappy, I knew. A girl with a Caddy convertible admiring the Sarouk and I hadn't sold her a thing. But I didn't care; I was looking forward to two-thirty.

When Papa came back and I told him about our visitor, he didn't look unhappy. He put his head on one side and studied me. "You will stick to business, Levon. Maybe, it's because you look so much like Tryon Power?" He smiled slyly.

"It's Tyrone, not Tryon, Papa," I said patiently. "And there's no resemblance, none at all."

"Does the mirror lie? In the washroom there's a mirror. Why don't you look?"

"Don't kid me, Papa," I said. "She was driving a Caddy, a new one, a convertible."

He shrugged. "You might as well take the station wagon. Then you can take the Sarouk along. How can she tell it won't go with modern unless she tries? Take the Sarouk along, Levon. Selak will go with you, to carry it up."

"I don't think she wants the Sarouk," I answered.

"It's time for your lunch," he said. "We will talk of it after lunch."

I went out to lunch. I still had her card in my hand. The name was engraved Claire Lynne. The address was penciled on the card, and I recognized it; the Prospect Towers. That meant money.

And the fact that the address was already penciled on the card indicated that she'd planned the appraisal before she entered the ship. Which dimmed the day only a little.

I don't remember what I had for lunch. I don't even remember everything Papa told me before I left for the Prospect Towers. But I took the station wagon. I took Selak along, and the Sarouk.

#### CHAPTER TWO

#### Consignment on Murder

HE Prospect Towers was only about ten years old, a towering, modern apartment building of glass and white glazed brick.

The apartment of Claire Lynne was on the top floor, a studio apartment, a story and a half high. This would be the most expensive floor in the building with a terrace overlooking the bay.

It was modern, all right, but not obnoxiously so. Soft colors and bleached woods. The immense living room was carpeted; there were no orientals in here.

Claire Lynne was wearing black lounging slacks, and a white blouse. The blouse was low-necked, and I felt that weakness in the legs again.

"The Bokhara's in here," she said, "in the dining room."

I followed her across the carpeted expanse to the L at one end of the room. Here, separated from the living room by a low wall, at right angles to the living room, was the dining room. Here was the so-called Bokhara.

Finely spun wool, compactly woven.



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Octagons on a background of Turanian red. A beautiful, finely finished piece, with a sheen that comes only from wear.

"Well?" she said.

"A lovely rug, and fine for modern furniture," I answered. "Any dealer would call it a Royal Bokhara, because that's the name they go by, in the trade. It's from the Turcoman group. It's Tekke. The real Bokhara is called Beshir in this country."

She didn't seem surprised. "That's what I was told," she agreed. "The man I got it from told me just what you have."

I bent down again. There was a stain running through the red, darkening it. "It should be cleaned," I said.

She didn't seem to be listening. "I think you're qualified," she said, "to look at another rug I have." She seemed thoughtful.

I rose and smiled at her. "This was a test, Miss Lynne? You wanted to get my reaction to this one first?"

She smiled right back at me. "That's right. The other rugs are in here."

I followed her back into the living room and through that to the entrance hall. From there, she led me to a fairly large room that seemed to be an unfurnished guest room. There was a flat pile of rugs on the floor in here.

I went through them, one by one, identifying them as well as I could. There were some antiques and semi-antiques in this pile. There was a lot of money on the floor in here, all in wool:

When I'd finished, I said: "You said 'another.' That would mean one. Which one were you referring to, Miss Lynne?"

one were you referring to, Miss Lynne?"

She opened the door to a closet. "In here."

I reached in and brought it out. I unfolded it, and stared.

I'd seen some fine pieces through the years, silk and wool and metallic. But this was far beyond any of those. This was the kind the old timers talked about
—the inspired work of a master weaver,
an antique prayer rug.

It wasn't big, but it could easily be priceless.

She said: "Name it."

"An antique. A Persian, could have come from Kashan, but I wouldn't be sure. I wish my father could see this."

"That's why I had you come up," she answered. "You can show it to him. I want you to put it in your safe, if you would. You have a safe for your fine pieces, haven't you?"

I nodded. "For our silks. This-do

you know what it is?"

"I think I do," she said. "You've heard of Maksoud of Kashan?"

I nodded. "He lived about four hundred years ago. The finest of the Persian weavers."

"That's right. His masterpiece is in the South Kensington Museum in London. It's called the Ardebil Carpet. His name is woven in a corner of the rug, in Arabic."

I nodded and looked down at the Arabic inscription on this rug. I looked up to meet her smile.

I said: "I understand he spent the better part of his life weaving that one in London. Thirty-three million knots. He wouldn't have much time for anything else."

"But if he had?"

I shook my head. I realized I'd been holding my breath and I expelled it, now.

"I think we ought to have a drink," she said, "don't you?"

"I could use it," I said.

We went back into the living room. I kept seeing that rug, I kept hearing the words, Maksoud of Kashan. And, for some reason, I kept remembering the blot on the dining room Bokhara.

I had Scotch with water. She drank rye. She sat on an armless love seat. I sat straight across from her, on its twin.

I couldn't quite understand her. I had the impression she'd been coached for her role this afternoon. Her information was too glib and detailed, too 'bookish'. We get customers like that once in a while, who spout information verbatim from one or the other books on the subicet.

While I was thinking these thoughts, I was looking at her, and that was an unmixed pleasure.

"You clean rugs at your place, Mr. Kaprelian?"

"We do. I've a man waiting downstairs. I'll have him come and get that Bokhara."

She nodded.

I felt sure.

"I brought the Sarouk along," I said,
"but it would be too big for the dining
room. I can have him put one of your
other russ down in there."

"Fine," she said, and studied her drink.

She was still looking thoughtful. She still hadn't said what was on her mind.

Finally, she said: "I'm not buying any rugs. I'm selling."

"The market's not too good," I said, "but of course, for rugs like those in that room. . ." I shrugged.

"The market's as good as the customers," she said. "I'd like you to sell those rugs for me on commission. I'll give you the leads."

"We'll be glad to try."

"I want you to sell them, not the firm. You see, the customers will be mainly

women."

I frowned. "I don't follow you, Miss
Lynne."

"Don't be modest," she said, and chuckled. "Oh, Lee, there's a mirror right down there at the end of the room. You can't be that blind. No one could be that naive."

I must have blushed like the village virgin, for my face was hot, my collar tight. In my discomfiture, the fact that she'd known my first name and used it didn't register right away.

I said: "We do some wholesale business, Miss Lynne. We have a few dealers who sell rugs that way. I don't think I'd want to be—"

"You've sold Henri Ducasse some rugs. Rather, you've given them to him on consignment, haven't you? And he's paid you after he sold them?"

Ducasse was a Frenchman who specialized in the widow trade. I nodded slowly.

"Do you realize the kind of money he was getting for your merchandise?"

was getting for your merchandise?"
"I've heard of a few deals."

"Well, Henri's aging. He's beginning to get that mummified look. He's not the man he was."

"And you think his shoes would fit me? You'd like me to become one of those—" I shook my head. "I don't know what to call him."

"Call him smart," she said quietly.

"And call him rich. Because he's both of those."

What she was asking me wasn't exactly dishonest, though it might be considered unethical. I looked at her, and realized I'd be spending some time with her, if I accepted the offer.

I said: "I'll get the man up here to pick up the Bokhara."

"You haven't answered me, Lee."
"I want some time." I rose.

"Get the man up," she said. "Take the Bokhara along. Perhaps you'd better wrap up that prayer rug inside of it. It's not the kind of piece to show just everybody, is it? It's too valuable to be advertising indiscriminately."

I went down and got Selak, and brought him up the back way. I helped him move the furniture in the dining room. Selak couldn't seem to get his eyes off Miss Lynne. When he first entered, he stared at her. All the time we were working, he continued to glance at her almost hungrily.

I brought the prayer rug out, and laid it in the center of the so called Bokhara.

Selak's attention wasn't divided any more. He knelt, to feel its velvet texture. In Armenian he said: "One of the old one. No rugs like this today. One of the old ones."

"One of the old ones," I agreed. "What kind, Selak?"

He started to answer, and then his eves got crafty. I might be buying this rug. He wasn't going to build it up in front of the seller. He shrugged, but he couldn't take the admiration out of his eyes as he looked at it again.

"Kashan," he said.

Maksoud had lived in Kashan. It was like calling a Rembrandt an Amsterdam,

When he'd shouldered the rugs, and left. Claire said: "Why did he stare at me like that? He gave me the shivers."

"Selak admires two things," I told her. "Beauty and quality."

Her smile was mocking. "In that case, it would be my beauty."

"Now, vou're being modest," I said. I wanted to reach out and pull her close. I wanted to do a lot of things that wouldn't be good business or good manners. "I'll let you know about-about the deal," I said.

She put a hand on my arm, "Come back tonight. There'll be somebody here I want you to meet."

"I've a date," I said.

"It'll be worth your while," she said. "After tonight, you can decide. I think you'll decide in my favor,"

I could smell her perfume and her face was close as she looked up. I like to think there's no hav in my hair, but I felt like Selak at the moment.

"All right," I said, "About eight?"

"About eight."

The door closed and I was walking down the carpeted hall to the elevator.

Her perfume was still with me, but it might have been only in my mind.

In the station wagon, Selak waited. "Keghetsig," he said, which is as close as I can come to the American spelling. In any event, it means beautiful.

"Beautiful," I agreed. "Both the rug and the girl."

He nodded.

I was no child, despite the way Papa treated me. I was no child, but I had a child's sense of guilt as we drove back to the store.

Papa was busy with a customer as we drove around in back to unload the rugs. Solak kept the Bokhara in the washroom; I brought the smaller rug into the store.

I opened the safe, and then decided to let Papa see the rug first. He would see it eventually, anyway; there was no reason to try to hid it from him. Nor was there any reason I should feel involved in whatever history it might It was just that damned unreasonable sense of guilt.

Selak came through from the back, carrying the Sarouk as the customer left.

"So she didn't want it?" Papa said. I shook my head.

He started to say something, and then he saw the rug near the safe. He came over to stare at it. He knelt to study, to finger it, to turn it over. He was murmuring in Armenian too low for me to hear.

Then he looked up, "Levon, where did you get this?"

"She had it. The customer, She wants to keep it in our safe."

"It's been a long time since I've seen a rug like this, outside a museum, outside a private collection. Where did she get it, Levon?"

"I don't know," I said.

He was looking at me sharply, "Who is this woman? You think I wouldn't know if there was a rug like this in town? How long has she been here? Who is she?"

"You know as much as I do, Papa," I said. "Her name is Claire Lynne and she lives in the Prospect Towers." I told him about some of the other rugs I'd seen, the antiques and semi-antiques.

He shook his head, and looked down again at the rug. "Silk warp and weft. Wool pile. Kashan, antique. But these Arabian letters?"

"Why don't we ask Sarkis," I suggested. "Sarkis can read Arabic."

He nodded. "Sarkis can read Arabian. But I don't want him to know we have this rug. Levon, I don't want anyone to know we have this rug in the safe. The Marines we should have, to guard this rug."

Reverently, Papa put the rug away while I went over to get down a couple of books from the shelf above his desk. In one I read: The Ardebil Carpet was

In one I read: The Araeou Carpet was the lifetime work of the greatest of all Persian weavers, Maksoud . . .

In the other: It is estimated that it took ten weavers more than three years to weave the famed 'Ardebil Carpet', credit for which goes to Maksoud, the weave master, who supervised...

Both books were considered authentic. There was no reason to think he hadn't woven the one now in our safe. There aren't more than three or four rugs in the world signed by their creator. If this one was genuine...

"Books," Papa said. "What are you going to learn about this business from books?" He tapped his head and breast. "Don't you know—here and here—when you see a masterpiece? Do you have to look everything up?"

"I was looking up the Ardebil Carpet," I said.

"Ardebil—from the mosque, you mean." He stared at me. "You think Maksoud?"

Selak came in from the washroom,

then, looking troubled. I heard the word "Bokhara" and "blood" but the rest was too garbled for me.

Papa nodded. "A Bokhara will bleed. They must be washed carefully, Selak. Careful, you must be."

Some more I couldn't understand, and then Papa went back to the washroom with Selak.

It was quiet in the shop. Outside, on the street people went by, traffic went by. But it seemed unusually quiet in the store.

When Papa came back in, his eyes were questioning. "A Bokhara will bleed, but not blood it won't bleed, Levon." He looked tired. "What has happened, today? This woman, this rug—" He extended his hands, palms up. "What are you hiding from me?"

"I'll know more after tonight," I said.
"I'm going back there tonight."

His face was grave. "The dance is tonight. The Junior League of the A.G.B.U is having their spring dance tonight, Levon. You aren't going with Berjouhi?"

I shook my head. "Maybe I can get there, later. Sam will take Berjouhi, and I can meet them there, later, maybe."

Sam was Sarkis' boy. Sam was my rival. And Berjouhi? She's a lovely, quiet girl. I'd been going with her, more or less, for three years. If Papa had had his way, we'd be married, right now.

"You promised you would take her? You are going to break your promise to her?"

The only answer to that was to use his own weapon, the one he'd taught me. "Business first, Papa," I said.

He opened his mouth to answer, and then clicked his teeth. He sighed, and went over to look out the huge plate glass window, the one where it says, N. Kaprelian and Son, in big, gold letters.

We don't get a paper downtown. We get the home edition. That's why I

didn't read about Henri Ducasse until just before supper.

Henri, who'd been described by Claire as smart and rich, was now something else. Henri Ducasse was dead.

He'd been found in a deserted garage stabbed to death. He hadn't, according to the authorities, been stabbed in the garage as there was very little blood on the cement floor, and it was obvious he had bled a lot. He was identified as a connoiseur of rugs and tapestries—and a bon vivant.

My sister, Ann, was reading the society page across from me, and I asked her: "What's a bon vivant, Ann?"

"Oh, a lover of good living," she said.
"A man who likes fine foods. Thinking of taking it up. Lee?"

"Not until business gets better," I answered. And then, at something in her voice. I looked up.

The paper was in her lap, and she was regarding me. "Papa says you're not going to the dance, tonight."

"He told you the truth."

"You've called Berjouhi?"

"From the store, before I left."

Ann shook her head, and her dark

eyes were quizzical. "You get away with murder. I know six boys who'd like to take your place with Berjouhi. How do you do it?"

"With mirrors," I said, and went back to reading about Henri Ducasse.

At the supper table, Papa was unusually silent. He would look at me from time to time, and I had the impression he wanted to say something. But he didn't.

Ann and Mom got into a discussion about one of Ann's customers at the hat shop. They carried the conversation.

After support Papa said: "A game of

After supper, Papa said: "A game of tavlu, Leon?"

"O.K.." I said.

It's called backgammon in this country, but Papa and his cronies still called

it tavlu. Also, they don't use a cup to throw the dice, a point I insisted on tonight.

"You think I would cheat, Levon?"

"No, of course not. But you get too many double sixes."

"That's the dice."

It was an old argument; there are more sixes than any other number they claim, and play accordingly. They get them and it isn't due to manipulation. What those experiments at Duke are trying to prove now, they knew for ages, these old-timers.

As we set up the board, Papa said:
"I've been thinking about that Bokhara.
I sold that rug, once. I'm trying to remember who I sold it to."

His memory was unbelievable, even for ordinary pieces.

"Maybe—Henri Ducasse?" I suggested. I kept my eyes on the board.

He shook his head. "Twenty years ago, or more, I sold that rug to somebody in this town. I can't remember." He tapped his forehead.

He played a sound game, making no mistakes, covered all the time, making all the traditional and routine moves. The only thing his game lacked was daring, and that's why I beat him three straight.

Which didn't prevent him from telling me: "You play a dangerous game, Levon. As you get older you will be more careful."

"I won," I said.

"You were lucky." He folded the board carefully, and put it in the bookcase. "You be careful tonight, Levon."

"I will," I promised, and went into my room to dress.

There wasn't any reason I couldn't wear the clothes I'd worn all day. No reason but that weakness in the legs. I wore my new gabardine suit and my best oxford suit. I wore a tie of rich and simple dignity. I was, I realized, also

wearing a smirk and I left that back in the bedroom, before going out into the living room.

Papa's gaze covered me over the top of his Mirror-Spectator. He said dryly: "You will remember the firm's reputation, Levon. You will make no promises for the firm before you talk to me." He went back to his reading.

I didn't answer him. He didn't expect an answer.

It was a warm night, a false summer night, and the moon was almost theatrical. The little convertible seemed to be humming to herself, as I cut over to Prospect.

The Prospect Towers were alive with light, the white brick reflected the moon's glow, the full length windows of the top floor were like a battery of beacons against the sky.

Over at the Parkleigh Hotel, the party would just be getting under way and I felt a moment's regert. I hadn't seen the gang all together for a long time.

Across the street, a broad, poorly-dressed man stood under the shadow of a budding maple tree. For a moment, I stared that way for it looked like Selak. But he made no move to leave the shadows, and I couldn't make out his face clearly from here. There'd be no reason for Selak to be up at this end of town, anyway.

As I waited outside of Claire's door, I could hear music inside. It was Aram Khachaturian's Saber Dance, a current juke box favorite. The timing was too pat; I felt like a fly waiting outside a spider's web. But perhaps I could turn into a bee, or perhaps this web wouldn't be as strong as its creator thought it.

Claire Lynne was wearing something misty in a pale green, something about as substantial-looking as a cloud. "You're on time," she said, her smile warm and friendly.

This didn't look like the start of an

ordinary dealer-customer relationship.

We went in, and she asked: "Recognize the music?"

"Strauss, isn't it?" I answered.

She sighed. "And all the work I went to—" She chuckled. "No, it's not Strauss, Lee."

A man was sitting on one of the armless love seats, and he rose as we entered. A short, dark man with one of those unlined faces. He could have been forty or seventy. But I knew he wasn't forty.

It was George Herro, a Syrian we had frequently dealt with, another Henri Ducasse, another social salesman.

"Good evening, Lee," he said. "How's your father?"

He extended his hand, and I took it. I said: "He's worried about business as usual. And tonight, he's worried about me."

Claire went over to turn off the record player. Herro said: "About you? You're in trouble Lee?"

in trouble, Lee?"
"Not yet," I said. "But I'm young
and innocent and don't know Khachaturian from Straus. And here I am, in

the major leagues."

Herro frowned. Claire laughed.

Herro said: "I don't-quite follow you, Lee."

"Yes, you do," I said. "And I want you to admit it before we go any further. If we're going to sell some rugs, we should understand each other, first."

Herro looked at Claire, and now they were both smiling. Herro said: "I underestimated you, Lee. Let's all sit down, shall we?"

We all sat down, neat and cozy.

Herro looked down at his hands, and up at me. "You've seen those rugs in the other rooms?"

I nodded.

"They need to be very carefully sold," he said. "They are not something to dump on the market." "Any really fine rug needs to be carefully sold," I said.

His eyes were reflective. "That's right. In 1911, Lee, I sold an antique Kirman for thirty thousand dollars. Later, at an auction, the same rug was sold by its owner for seven hundred." He paused. "I sold an Ispahan for thirty-five thousand to the same customer. At the auction, it brought twelve hundred."

"I wasn't alive, then," I said, "but those were the golden years, at the beginning of this century. A lot of very wealthy men collected orientals as a hobby. Those were the collector's years."

"And those are collector's rugs."

"But this isn't 1911."

He stirred. "No. It isn't. A lot of bad management has come into the business since then. Throat and price cutting has come into the business, and dealers who try to compete with carpeting. This isn't the business it was—nor are those the kind of rugs you'll find on the market today."

"Miss Lynne said something about customers-" I put in.

"That's what I was coming to. There are still some of the discerning customers left. We know quite a few." "Mostly women?"

He nodded, watching me, looking for a reaction.

a reaction.

"That's your field, George," I pointed
out.

"It was." He smiled, "Before I became—emotionally involved with a few of them."

"And these rugs-where'd they come from?"

"Most of them are from a St. Louis collection. I picked some of them up there. The rest are from town, here. They were bought, through the years, by a man of breeding and taste and discernment. I don't have to tell you these aren't the kind you're buying today." I looked at Claire Lynne. I said: "That's a different story than you told me when you came to the store today."

"I wasn't revealing my hand, at the time," she said. She looked at me levelly. "I thought it was a little early."

For a moment, nobody said anything. Then George Herro said quietly: "Well, Lee?"

I waited until my silence got through to them, and then asked: "What happened to Henri Ducasse?"

Neither of them flinched. Claire shrugged. Herro said: "I understand he was trying to sell a rug to a man named Dykstra. I understand the deal was almost completed when Dykstra discovered the rug wasn't as represented. This is just rumor one hears in the trade. I cannot youch for it, personally."

"Dykstra—" I said. "We sold him some rugs a few years back. War profiteer, wasn't he?"

"Among other things. He was something of an expert on repeating weapons, I understand. And explosives, generally, Had a rather thriving, if illegal, trade in things of that sort." He smiled dimly. "Why do you ask about Henri Dueasse, Lee? What has he to do with this business?"

"I didn't know, That's why I asked. Claire mentioned him, today."

She said: "It was just a coincidence, Lee."

"All right," I said, "I'll work along with you." I didn't mention the Bokhara, then; I was saving that. "How about that rug you have in our safe? You've got a customer for that?"

Hero said: "We won't worry about that for a while. I've an idea we can get our price for that." He looked at the thin gold watch on his wrist. "Well, I've an engagement at nine-thrity." His smile tried to read some intriguing meaning into the words, some romantic rendezvous. He rose. "Till leave you two young people to amuse yourselves now."

Claire went to the door with him. I went over to the record player. She had all of The Gayne Suite there, and I put

When she came back, I was sitting on one of the love seats.

"So?" she said.

"So, it's settled. You don't mind if I'm a little uneasy about it, though?"

She didn't answer that right away. She was bending over a decanter on the cocktail table between us. "Scotch, again, with water?"

"Fine." I averted my eyes, like a gentleman.

As she handed me my drink, she said: "Why are you uneasy?"

"For one thing-Ducasse, who was killed. Then-Herro, He's never been arrested, but he's had some close calls, I remember. And one other thing-that blot on the Bokhara. It was blood, Claire "

Poise, she had. Or innocence? I would settled for poise. Her eyes didn't waver, there was no visible tenseness in her. She frowned, "Blood?"

"Blood. Enough of it to make me wonder how it got there."

"I can't tell you, Lee, because I don't know. It was that way when I got it. And I got it yesterday; George brought it up."

"You know where he got it?"

She nodded. "I know. But it would involve someone I don't want involved. Lee."

There seemed to be a lot of faith required from me in this business. I said: "All right. We'll forget about it-for now."

We didn't talk about rugs for the rest of the evening. We drank a little, and listened to some music. We went out onto the terrace, and there I obeyed that impulse I'd had at the door this afternoon. I pulled her into my arms and kissed her.

She seemed to enjoy it. She seemed to expect it.

When I got down to the car again, it was two-thirty. The broad man no longer stood under the maple tree. He was asleep in the seat of my car. It was Selak.

His mouth was open, and he was snoring heavily. I went around to the driver's side quietly and climbed in behind the wheel. I'd driven him more than halfway home before he woke up.

He shook himself and straightened in his seat, rubbing his eyes. I stole a glance at him. He seemed embarrassed and looked straight ahead. The clothes he wore were tight. But I knew they were his best.

I said: "I didn't expect to see you up at this end of town, Selak. Been to a show?"



Something that sounds like "Voch" which is "no."

By the tone of his voice, I realized he didn't relish any questioning. I said no more. He shared the silence.

When I stopped in front of his house, there was a light on. His sister, a thin, prematurely gray girl, was waiting on the porch, and she came down to the walk as the car stopped.

"Selak-where have you been?"

Then she saw me. "Oh, Lee—he was with you? Everything is all right?" "Everything's all right." I assured

"Everything's all right," I assured her. "He was out with me."

"He's never been out this late, before," she said. "You were at the dance?"

"No. No, we were over to see a friend of mine."

Selak had left the car, was going up the steps to the porch. He hadn't said good-night. I didn't know if he was miffed or embarrassed. He'd probably been hit as hard as I was.

I said good-night to his sister, and turned the little convertible toward home. There was no reason I should sing, but I sang. There was no reason I should feel smug and sophisticated and adventurous. But all these things, I felt.

Papa's curiosity was greater than his temporary annoyance with Sarkis, evidently. For Sarkis was at the store when I got there the next morning, and Papa was getting the prayer rug out of the safe.

Sarkis looked at it in awe, and some ejaculation escaped his throat. He knelt like a man in church.

"Maksoud of Kashan," he read, and "the year is 940." He looked thoughtful. "That would not be our calendar. That would be about 1560 or 62." He looked at my father. "Where did you get this treasure?"

"It isn't mine," Papa said. "Can you believe it's genuine?"

Sarkis' broad face was grave. "It's an

antique. But that rug from the mosque. It's an Ispahan, isn't it?"

"You could ask Levon," Papa answered, "He read the books."

"Not enough of them," I said. "In three books I got three dates for the Ardebil Carpet and no designation. What do you honestly think about it?"

He shook his head, and looked at it again. "What does it matter? There are none like it, today. A rug like this, if you owned it, you could ask anything, anything the customer could pay. There

would be no other limits."

"Ethics, Sarkis," I chided him.
"Ethics?" Both of them looked at

"Ethics?" Both of them looked at me blankly.

Then Sarkis said: "Across from me is a picture store. In the window, something you couldn't call a picture. Two weeks I've been seeing that picture every day and can't figure what it is. But the price card I can read—twenty-five hundred dollars. That's plain enough. Ethics?"

"All right, then, how much would you pay for that rug, Sarkis?"

"I'm a poor man," he answered. "My money is all in merchandise. I am a dealer, not a collector."

"You are a wolf, not a lamb, you mean?" I grinned at him.

He sighed, and looked at my father.
"These young ones," he said.

Papa frowned at me. "You will remember Sarkis is my cousin."

Yesterday, Sarkis had been his contemporary. Today he was his cousin. Today they shared a reverence for craftsmanship.

I said no more. I concentrated on the Serapi I was repairing. I was only vaguely aware of the small, dark man on the walk outside, looking in through the open door.

Papa was saying: "And how did you make out with Mr. Egan, Sarkis?"

"All carpeting, the whole first floor,"

Sarkis answered. "And the rugs that man used to buy . . . But his wife, you know. His wife has the money, and it's carpeting for her." He shook his head sadly.

The small, dark man was in the doorway now, and I looked up. He was staring at the rug still on the floor in front of the safe. I don't know why I was suddenly nervous, but I was.

He had a thin face, this man, and a nose like a parrot's beak. He had the small, round eyes of a bird, too, eyes black as sin. He was wearing a black derby, which he removed, now, disclosing a completely bald head, glistening with perspiration.

"That rug, gentlemen—" he said. "It is for sale?" He reached into an inner pocket as he said this.

With one motion, Papa had tossed the rug into the safe and clanged the door shut. There had been something so malevolent about that gesture of his, Papa had reacted instinctively.

But the man had a handkerchief in his hand, now, and he was wiping the perspiration from his shining head. "It is for sale?" he repeated.

Papa shook his head. "It is not ours, sir. We are keeping it for a customer." "I may see it? I believe I once owned

it."
Papa shook his head stubbornly. "It

Papa shook his head stubbornly. "I is not ours to show."

The black eyes went from Papa to Sarkis, and back. "It is a secret? Or you do not trust me?"

Papa said: "It is a very valuable rug. It is not ours. I am sorry, sir."

Silence. The man looked at Sarkis, then at me, as though sizing up his adversaries before making an attack. Finally: "You gentlemen are Christians?" The voice was faintly tinged with contempt.

We all nodded.

"You would not know, then, the value

of that rug. In the mosque at Ardebil, it was woven by the slave, Maksoud. To Allah it was dedicated, and to his Prophet, Mohammed. It was never intended for Christian use nor Christian admiration."

"We can not help but admire it,"
Papa said. 'We are not using it. If you
will pardon me, sir, it is a busy morning . . . If there is something else, I
can show you—"

"There is nothing else you can show me. But you can tell me the name of the one who owns this rug?" A pause, "I can deal directly with him."

Sarkis said something to Papa in Armenian, and Papa's face was suddenly stone. Papa said: "You are—Turkish?" There was no 'sir' this time. Papa had spent his youth under the Turks.

The man looked at Sarkis and Papa. If he felt any fear, he didn't show it. But he must have felt it; they were related to me, and still I felt the goose-flesh form on my arms and neck. The two men who stood there near the safe were no longer rug dealers in an American city. They were no longer rational. "What does it matter?" the man said.

All of Sarkis' family had been massacred by the Turks. Papa's sister had been killed by the Turks. What does it matter? the man had asked.

"Answer me, damn you!" Papa's voice was hoarse; it was a voice I had never heard before. His face was white. "You come into my store in this free country. You speak of my religion with contempt. You interfere in my business. You—"

Now, the man was frightened as Papa stepped toward him.

I was up quickly standing between them. I had my hands on Papa's shoulders. "Please, Papa, no trouble—" I put an arm around him. "Your heart, Papa."

Sarkis said to the little man: "You had better go. You had better get the hell out of here quick."

The man surveyed us all. "I will be back," he said. "You will see me again." He turned abruptly and went out the door

Papa expelled his breath and sat down on a pile of rugs, gasping. His eyes were reminiscent. His mind, I would guess, was back in Since under the Trushe

was back in Sivas, under the Turks. Sarkis said: "I'm late, now. I must get back to the store. Be calm, Nishan. Do not think about the man."

Papa didn't answer. His face was still white; he seemed to be having some difficulty getting his breath.

I went to the washroom and got him a glass of water. Sarkis had left when I came back with it. Papa drank it slowly, his eyes watering.

"You're in America, now, Papa," I said quietly. "You must forget the old country and the people you hated."

He nodded and looked up at me. "I am in America. Levon, one thing you must always, always be thankful for. One thing you must thank God for, every night. You are an American."

"It's for me," I agreed. "How do you feel, now?"

"All right. Better." He wiped his eyes.
"Levon, what kind of business is this
you're in? What kind of people are these
you're dealing with?"

you're dealing with?"
"I don't know for sure," I told him.
"I'm being careful. Don't worry about

that. George Herro's in the deal, too."
"Oh." His glance traveled my face.
"George is getting old. You are going

to be the new George Herro?"
"Not if I can help it. The rugs I'm
going to sell are worth anything I can
get, Papa. Nobody has to be ashamed
of asking big money for rugs like those."

"But you will sell to women?"
"Some of them, I suppose."

"You've told Berjouhi this?"

"No," I said impatiently. "I'm not married to her, Papa. We're not even engaged." "So? All right. But you haven't told me about everybody, Levon. You haven't told me about Mr. Egan."

I stared at him. "Egan? What about him?"

"I remembered this morning who I sold that Kokhara to, Levon, It was Mr. Egan. Twenty years ago I sold him that rug for his study."

I remembered Claire saying: "It would involve someone I don't want involved." I said: "I didn't know Mr. Egan was involved, Papa. And maybe he isn't. He might have sold that rug years ago."

Papa nodded. "Maybe. But I am going to ask around, Levon. Next time the Pinochle Club meets, I'm going to ask the dealers."

I thought of Herro saying: "They were bought through the years by a man of breeding and taste and discernment."
Mr. Egan was a man who could fit that description. Mr. Egan had a wife who controlled the purse strings. But I couldn't see him as an accomplice in anything questionable.

A little later, Papa went out to deliver a rug and I was alone in the store. I phoned Claire.

I told her about the little man who'd been in.

"He's after it," she said, "and that's why he came to the store. He must have seen you take the other rug yesterday. H wants it pretty badly, Lee. He means to get it, one way or another. Our job is to see what he pays for it."

"It will be a pleasure," I said. "Anything lined up?"

"Yes. This afternoon. I've a customer I wanted you to show that Feraghan to."

"Good-looking customer?"

"She's lovely. She's well over sixty or I wouldn't let you even talk to her, smarty. I'm changing the strategy after last night, Lee. I think Herro will handle all the trade under sixty." "We'll talk about that when I see you," I told her. "And I'll probably see you about one-thirty. Will that be all right?"

"I'll be waiting," she said.

When I turned from the phone, there was a man standing near the doorway just inside the store. He was a big man in a worn brown suit. He had a broad, pugnacious face and he didn't look like a customer.

"Mr. Kaprelian?" he asked. I nodded. "Lee Kaprelian. My father

is out, just now."

He displayed a shield in his wallet. "Sergeant Waldorf," he said, "out of Homicide, Mr. Kaprelian. I'm checking on a Henri Ducasse."

My breath was a little short. I said: "I read about him in the paper yester-day."

He nodded. "Knew him, did you?"

"He's handled some rugs for us. Or not exactly that. We've let him have some rugs on consignment and if he sold them, he'd pay us our price."

Waldorf seemed to be studying me. "Your price. But his price could be about anything, couldn't it?"

"So I've heard," I said. "This is a strange business, Sergeant."

"I'm beginning to find that out. And I've heard of buyer's strikes, too. But I can't quite see murder as a means of combating inflation, can you?"

"It would depend upon the customer,"
I said, and managed to smile. "Is that
your theory, Sergeant?"

"No. But it's Vartanian's and Bogosian's and Herro's. They all told me about Dykstra. There seems to be a rug dealer's agreement that Ducasse tried to stick Dykstra and Dykstra bumped him."

I breathed easier. This was a routine check. I said: "I've heard that, too. I don't know much about Dykstra. My dad sold him a few pieces during the war, but I was in the army then, so I never met him."

He lighted a cigarette and watched the smoke for a moment. "And there's another gent walking through this case, too. Little guy in a derby hat. He's been hanging around all the dealers, but he didn't leave any name, with any of them. Seen him?"

"About a half an hour ago," I said.
"But he didn't stay long. Papa found
out he was a Turk. You almost had another homicide on your hands, Sergeant."

He smiled. "He doesn't like Turks, huh?"

"He came to this country to get away from them," I said. "He spent his boyhood in Armenia."

"What do you think he was after? This little gent with the black derby, I mean."

I hesitated. I said: "He was very much interested in a rug we have in the safe. He wanted to buy it."

Now, there was interest in the sergeant's eyes. He looked at me steadily. "Price?"

"No—it wasn't ours to sell. We're just holding it for a customer."

"Valuable rug?"

"Very."
"Who's the customer?"

Again, I hesitated. "I don't like to say, Sergeant. I don't like to involve our customers in this kind of investigation."

"He won't be involved," the sergeant said, "unless he should be."

For the third time, I hesitated. But I'd opened the door to this line of questioning; it was too late to shut it. I said: "It's a woman. A Miss Claire Lynne, who lives on the top floor of the Prospect Towers."

He put it down in a notebook he had. Then: "I suppose I'd better look at the rug. Not that it will mean anything to me. But I might have to identify it later."

I opened the safe and brought it out.

He studied it for seconds, some awe in his eyes. He nodded and I put it away.

"Anything else that might help, Mr. Kaprelian?"

I thought of the Bokhara. I said: "That's all, Sergeant."

"O.K. I think I'll check this Miss Lynne before I go up against Dykstra. I'll need all the ammunition I can get before I hit him." He looked at me closely a moment. "Thanks."

I nodded, saying nothing.

I watched him leave the store and elimb into a car out at the curb. There was another detective behind the wheel of the car. When it pulled away, I went to the phone.

Claire answered almost immediately. I said, "A detective was here, check-

ing on Henri Ducasse. I told him about the rug. Claire."

A silence. Then in a low voice: "Which rug, Lee?"

"The one in the safe. He's on his way up to see you, now."

Something like relief in her voice.
"O.K. I'm glad you called. Don't forget-one-thirty."

I went back to repairing the Serapi. Which rug, Lee . . . It would involve someone I don't want involved, Lee . . . I remembered who I sold that Bokhara to, Levon It was Mr. Egan . . . But his wife, you know. His wife has the money, and . . .

Mr. Egan had been described as a man of breeding and taste and discernment, if Herro had been talking about him. Maybe, all the rugs were Mr. Egan's. That St. Louis story was too gib; one of the finest collections in the world was in St. Louis, and Herro would think of that town if he was looking for a fast answer.

The clock above the safe read twelve

o'clock, and I went back into the rear shop.

"Time to eat, Selak," I said.

He didn't look at me today. He didn't smile as he had yesterday. He nodded, sulkily, and turned off the rotary-brush machine. I'd never expected to see Selak jealous of me.

When I went back into the store again, I heard the machine start. Evidently, he didn't have any appetite, to-day. Or maybe he didn't want to leave a rug half done and full of soap.

About twelve-thirty, Papa came in, and I told him about the deal I had for the afternoon.

He looked unhappy. "You're working on commission on this, Levon?"

"That's right. We'll split the commission, Papa."

He waved that away. "No. Not those kind of sales."

"It's an antique Fereghan," I said.
"You think I should sell it cheap?"

He looked interested. "Green in the border?" "All Fereghans have that. It's like

velvet. Yellow, rose, blue, purple, violet, red. And they all blend. It's an odd size, narrower than most."

He nodded. "Mr. Egan's?"

"Not that I know of."

"It sounds," Papa said, "like a rug he bought from Bogosian, years ago."

"Well, maybe it is, then. Maybe he sold it years ago."

"Maybe," Papa agreed. "I took some rugs over to Grace to be repaired.".

Grace was Selak's sister, and she did our finer repairing. I didn't say anything.

Papa said: "She told me Selak was with you last night. You brought him home."

"That's right."

Papa put a hand on my arm. "I'm glad he was with you. I was worried about you, Levon."

"Don't worry about me," I said. "I'm a big boy now." I didn't feel any more like Judas than Judas must have felt. "I think I'll take Selak this afternoon if he's finished the cleaning. This is a high class. sale, and I don't want to be lugging the rug like some peddler."

"Sure," Papa said. "Take the station wagon, too,"

I went back to the washing room. where Selak was running the big squeegee over the rug, taking out the surplus water. "Don't start another one, Selak," I said. "I'll need you after lunch."

He nodded, not looking at me.

When I came back from lunch, he was sitting in the station wagon. He'd changed from the sweat shirt he wears for washing to a semi-clean white shirt. His hair was plastered in a crooked part,

"Did you eat lunch?" I asked, as I climbed behind the wheel.

He nodded, looking straight ahead. I cut out of the alley, and over to the Avenue, up the Avenue to Prospect.

Using the station wagon, we didn't need to stick to the streets designated for trucks. And it looked better than a truck for this business.

The false summer weather still held. Most of the traffic along Prospect was toward the beach and the picnic grounds in the Park. When I stopped in front of the Towers, I could see Claire up on the top floor terrace. She waved, and I waved back.

I told Selak: "You can come along. I'm going to pick up a rug."

He was still staring up at Claire.

She met us at the elevator. She said: "I didn't expect you'd bring a chaperone."

"I thought I might need one. Have you made the appointment?"

She nodded. "For two o'clock, It's Mrs. Harlan Cooke. Do you know her?"

Mrs. Harlan Cooke was a woman of sixty who tried to look forty and looked eighty. "I've sold her a rug or two," I said.

We went into the apartment. Claire asked: "What do you think we could get for that Feraghan?" She paused. "George thought about six thousand-"

"Maybe. And maybe more. I'll get her reaction to the higher figure first."

She was looking uneasily at Selak. Selak's heart was in his eyes. I took him into the room that held the rugs and helped him pull the rug from the pile.

"Wait for me in the car," I said. "I'll be right down."

When he'd left, carrying the rug, Claire asked: "What's the matter with him? Why does he stare at me like that?"

"It's spring," I said. "It's been a long winter."

She studied me. "It's not spring for you, is it? You're all business, today." "That's my training. The days for

business, the nights for romance." Annoyance was on her face. "There's

something wrong, isn't there? You're different from-from last night."

"Maybe. Last night I hadn't met the Turk with the derby nor Sergeant Waldorf. Last night, I didn't know that was Mr. Egan's Bokhara."

She was quiet. She was chewing her lower lip vexedly and thoughtfully.

"I thought I was a partner," I said quietly, "not a stooge."

"Lee-" She looked up pleadingly. "You're not that, You know you're not." She took one of my hands in both of hers. "After you've seen Mrs. Cooke, come back. There isn't time to explain it all now, but I will when you come back."

"All right," I said. "But one thing before I go. How did you make out with Waldorf?"

"How should I make out with him? He was investigating Henri Ducasse's death, and I had nothing to do with that. As for the rug, I told him I'd had it for years. Which is a lie, but I didn't think it was any of his business."

"We'll talk about that, too, later," I

said. "Good-bye for now."

She was looking up expectantly. I

kissed her and my legs got rubbery again, and I had a hunger I knew pilaff wouldn't satiate.

"O.K.," I said, "it's spring. But I'll want the story just the same, Claire, when I come back. I'll want it straight."
"You'll get the whole story," she said.

### CHAPTER THREE

### Soul for Sale

RS. HARLAN COOKE lived on in River Hills, the gold coast of this town of mine. She was a very careful woman with a dollar unless the dollar was to be spent for oriental rugs or male companionship. For these two, she would unlatch the roll. She was canny enough to try for both in the same deal. Henri Ducasse had been her boy, there.

A maid opened the door and led the way into a mammoth living room, expensively and ornately furnished.

Mrs. Harlan Cooke was waiting for us in here, posed graciously in a wingback tapestry chair, smoking a cigarette through a long, ebony and gold holder.

The room was dim; the illusion was almost complete at this distance. But it needed distance. As I came closer, the make-up was too obvious, the sag in her thin figure too evident. Ducasse, I was beginning to realize, had earned his money.

"Back from the wars?" she said in a high voice. "It's been a long time, Lee." She came forward to greet me.

"You haven't changed," I said. "Nor has this beautiful house. You've the most delicate and artistic taste in this town, Mrs. Cooke."

After that, the chiseling started.

It was a battle. The old girl knew how to dicker, and she held the upper hand, being the buyer. But when Selak spread out the Feraghan, I saw the expression in her eyes as she looked at it and I knew it was just a matter of time. She wanted that rug.

She got it, finally. For seventy-one hundred dollars, which was just four hundred under my opening price and eleven hundred higher than her opening offer.

As she wrote out the check, she said: "I'd expected Mr. Herro to bring the rug. He's still in town, isn't he?"

"I think so," I said, "He was last night. He certainly—admires your taste, Mrs. Cooke. He insisted there was only one customer in town who had the background to appreciate that Feraghan. I would have waited for him to come back this afternoon, but Miss Lynne had another customer who wanted the rug badly, and I wanted you to have the first chance at it." I smiled. "Regular customers first."

"Thank you, Lee," she said, and tried a smile herself. But the makeup threatened to crack, and she killed it half-born, "I wish you would tell Mr. Herro that I'm still in the market for anything worthwhile, though."

I felt faintly let down. Not that I believe what Papa says about Tyrone Power, but I didn't expect to run second to George Herro.

"I'll be sure and tell him," I said, and folded the check carefully.

She was frowning, as she walked with me to the door. There, she said; "By the way—who is this Miss Lynne? A friend of—Mr. Herro's?"

"A friend of mine," I said, and smiled reassuringly.

"I see," she said archly. "Well, be sure and tell Geor— Mr. Herro I was asking about him." This kind of business wasn't for me. My conscience was elastic enough to charge what the traffic will bear, but not enough to trade on an old woman's sentiment. Not that she wasn't a fraud. Not that she wasn't able to take care of herself—and her purse. It was just that I didn't believe a piece of your soul should go with every sale.

I dropped Selak off at the store on the

way back.

When I got to the Towers, it was only three o'clock.

Claire said: "It didn't take you long."
I handed her the check. "It was a straight sale," I told her. "Mrs. Cooke's

heart belongs to George Herro."

She nodded. "I know. But he's disci-

plining her. She bought a rug from Henri Ducasse a month ago."

I lighted a cigarette, saying nothing. I went over to stand near the door leading to the terrace. "I don't like this way of đoing business, Claire," I said. "We wouldn't lose much if we were careful, selling them straight."

"Straight?" She cocked her head to one side. "There wasn't anything crooked about that sale, was there? I don't understand you, Lee."

"You understand me," I said, "and it isn't anything illegal, but I wasn't only selling her a rug, I was selling her a chance to see Herro. I don't like it. It's messy." I paused. "And now, I'd like to hear the story, the true story, about those rugs."

"Sit down and relax," she said.

I sat down, but I couldn't relax.

"The rugs are Mr. Egan's as you guessed. He's got a bill of sale for every one of them. He wants to sell out, and because he's known me a long time and trusted me, he's stored them here. He's the one who suggested George Herro. He's the one who suggested you." She paused. "Anything illegal in that?"

"Why doesn't he sell them from his house?"

Claire shrugged. "I don't know. He's

willing to sell them to us, to George and me, but neither of us had the money. So we give him a share, as each one is sold." "His wife knows about it?"

Claire's face stiffened. "I don't-what are you driving at, Lee?"

"She has the money in that family." I said. "Mr. Egan buys some fine rugs with her money. To her, a rug is just a floor covering, and after a number of years must be replaced. After fifteen or twenty years, those rugs haven't lost a nickel of value. He was a very careful buyer. He has a big wad of money in a stack of rugs she considers worthless. Now, he sells out—and gets out?"

"You're guessing," she said. "It isn't fair to Mr. Egan guessing those kind of things about him."

"All right, I'm guessing. I'll find out,

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later, how well I'm guessing. And now the Turk?"

"Ismet?"

"I don't know his name."

"Ismet Bey," she said. "He ran a cult out in the town of cults, Los Angeles, It was part Mohammedan and part voodoo and part pseudo-science, I guess. He went out of town for a week on a trip with—one of his disciples, and the law stepped in. The disciple's papa had called them in. Ismet left town again when he heard the police were looking for him. His temple furnishings were sold at auction." She shrugged. "George was at the auction."

"That's where he picked up the rug?"
"That's his claim. I don't believe everything George says, though, do you?"

"Not always."

"Well, that's what I know. Your imagination will probably fill in a lot of things that aren't true, but that's my story."

I got up and went out to the terrace. I wanted to think about these things, without looking at her. I couldn't be rational while I was looking at her.

It was phoney enough. It was as phoney as a lead dollar or seemed that way to anybody who was sane. If I was going to get out, now would be the time.

From the doorway, she called:

"Scotch, Lee?"

of now."

"No," I said. "I'll be running along. I'd like to get over and see Mrs. Egan this afternoon."

"Don't," she said. "It's his business, Lee. You've no right to go messing into his domestic life."

his domestic life."

"O. K., I won't. That's answer enough for me. You can count me out of it—as

She stood in the doorway like a statue, her face blank, her body motionless. "Now-what caused that decision?"

"An accumulation of bad angles," I said. "It wasn't any one incident. Let's just pretend we never met."

And then, because the weakness was on the way back, because she looked so startled and innocent there in the doorway. I got out fast.

I didn't look back when I reached the street. I had a hunch she'd be up there on the terrace.

At the store, Papa was in back talking to Selak, his voice high and excited.

When he came back to the front again, he said: "Selak wants to quit. But he won't tell me why." He shook his head.

"He's in love and jealous," I said.
"Jealous of me, but you can tell him
there's no reason to be."

"So-" Papa said. "So it wasn't all business?"

"It was mostly business, but bad business. I don't want to talk about it."

He shrugged and went over to check his books.

I felt noble and moral and miserable. The trouble was, it was still spring.

The afternoon dragged on. About five, Papa put his books away and said: "I think I'll go home. You can close up, Levon."

We closed at five-thirty. I nodded. He paused in the doorway for a mo-

ment, and I could feel his eyes on me. Finally: "Levon—Berjouhi is beautiful, too."

"I know," I said. "I know. I'm all right. I'm no baby."

Papa sighed. "No . . . All right. I'll see you at supper."

He left and I went back to see Selak. But Selak wasn't there. I went back into the store, just as Mr. Egan entered.

He's a good looking gent, despite his years. He's close to sixty, I'd say, but he's the kind of thin, tall gent who can wear clothes. He never had enough troubles in his life to age him.

He seemed exceptionally uncomfortable, his face faintly flushed.

"Good-afternoon, Lee," he said. "Miss

Lynne has asked me to explain some things to you."

"It's not necessary, Mr. Egan. You don't owe me any explanations."

"Perhaps not, But I'd like you to understand that—" He paused. "That my wife is fully aware I'm selling those rugs." Again, he paused. "You may phone her right now, if you wish."

"I'll repeat," I said, "that you don't have to explain anything to me, Mr.

Egan. I'm out of it."

"That's why I'm explaining," he said.
"I—don't want you out of it, Lee. I have too much faith in your sales ability. And too little faith in George Herro's integrity."

I didn't say anything for a moment.

I was thinking of Claire,

Mr. Egan said, "This is very embarrassing for me. I'm not conditioned to to begging, Lee."

It was embarrassing to me, too. Whenever I'd seen the word "gentle-man" used, I'd always thought of Mr. Egan. He'd symbolized all the things an ignoramus like me thought of as a gentleman, a cultured person.

But I'd sold a lot of the carriage trade; I wasn't completely naive. I said flatly: "How about that Bokhara, Mr. Egan?"

He frowned. "It's mine, of course."
"I know that. But whose blood was

on it?"

"Blood?" His surprise, I felt, was honest. "You're talking in riddles, Lee. I bought that rug from your father, more than twenty years ago. I.—"

"Miss Lynne didn't tell you about the

He shook his head, saying nothing, staring at me.

"There was so much of it," I said, "so much, it was suspicious. Maybe my imagination was too active. But you see, Henri Ducasse's death was in the papers that same day, and Claire—Miss Lynne

-had talked of him. The whole set-up looked bad."

He wasn't listening. "Blood-" he said. "Dry, Lee?"

"Dried, So maybe it wasn't so important. Henri was just killed yesterday, I guess,"

He shook his head. "Haven't you read the evening papers? Henri Ducasse was found yesterday. He was killed three or four days ago." His eyes were reminiscent. "Ducasse—"he said, and he was talking to himself. His face grew tight. "Lee, we'll talk about this later. Don't decide against us just yet."

He turned and was gone from the store.

It was nearly five-thirty, now. I locked the back door, and turned out the lights in the washing room. I checked the windows back there. In the store, I checked the safe also and set the alarm system.

All this I did automatically, thinking of Claire every second. Even Egan's sudden departure didn't interest me; there didn't seem to be any room in my mind for anything but Claire.

As for Selak, I felt sure he'd be back tomorrow. Grace would talk to him and straighten him out, if he told her he'd quit.

At five-thirty, I got the signal from the alarm system and left.

I went home by way of Prospect Avenue. It isn't the direct route, but I took it for the same perverted reason you'd prod a sore tooth with your tongue.

I didn't look up as I passed the Towers. It was an effort of will, but I managed it. That's how I happened to notice
the derby going through the front door,
and the narrow back of Ismet Bev.

It wasn't any of my business. I was well out of it. I was due home for supper, and after supper I intended to get drink.

Only there was this parking space at

the curb, beckoning almost and I slid the convertible into it.

So he'd found the owner of Maksoud's rug. Or, at least, the possessor. Had he come to make an offer? Or had he come to make a claim? There was danger in this ridiculous little man, I sensed; there was a threat to Claire.

When I reached Claire's door, I could hear their voices inside. I could hear the Turk saying: "It was my rug originally. I know how much it went for at the auction. I don't know what you paid for it, Miss Lynne, but I'm prepared to give you forty thousand dollars for it. In eash, of course."

Claire's voice: "I'll have to talk this over with Mr. Herro."

"It was Mr. Herro," Ismet Bey said, 
"who sent me to you, Miss Lynne." 
And now his voice was lower. "I mean 
to have that rug one way or another, 
Miss Lynne."

That's when I rang her bell.

She didn't smile when she saw me there. She said: "I can't think of any more you'd want to tell me, Lee."

"I saw Bey come in here." I took a breath. "I worried about you, Claire. I thought—"

"Come in," she said, without expres-

When I entered the living room, Ismet Bey rose and smiled. He bowed slightly. "The boy from the store." He nodded. "We'll make a deal, now?"

"First," Claire said, "I want you to tell Lee the history of your losing the rug, Mr. Bey." Her voice was brittle and she avoided my eyes. "Lee seems to think he's being hoodwinked."

He looked from me to her, and back to me. "Of course." The smile, again, and he seated himself. "As soon as we're all comfortable."

The story he told was substantially the same she'd told me about him, The only difference was that he put his own position in a more favorable light. His trip out of town had been a business trip, purely a business trip.

"That was in January," he told me.
"At the auction in February, the rug
was sold to settle some claims. I did not
know who bought it. I heard only last
week that it had come to this town. Today Mr. Herro contacted me and gave
me this address and Miss Lynne's
name."

"You want to buy it back? For how much, Mr. Bev?"

"For forty thousand dollars."

"You must want it badly."

"Who can value an altar? Who can appraise the symbol of a faith, Mr. Lee? If it were cotton and machine-made, it would still have value under those qualifications. But this—this could conceivably be the work of Maksoud. My disciples believe it is; I almost believe it is myself. There is no proof of this; there can be no proof. But there remains the faith."

"Forty thousand dollars' worth of faith?"

His face grew faintly harder. "We've mentioned the sum enough, I think. It will be cash and no record of the transaction need be made. It will be tash-free money. I am not a poor man, Mr. Lee, and it was the rug which helped to make me a rich one. The price I am suggesting is more than fair. It will be my only offer."

"It's the merchant blood in me," I said. "I like to haggle."

"I am not here for that purpose."

I looked at Claire. "You're the boss." She looked at Ismet Bey, and I thought I saw uneasiness in her eyes. "It seems like a fair offer to me," she said quietly.

"It's a small rug," I said, "and even if Maksoud wove it, that's a lot of money, an awful lot of money."

"It is settled, then?"

"It's settled," Claire said. "Tomorrow morning, at ten o'clock, here. Bring the money. The rug will be here."

He nodded agreeably and rose, I said: "Was it Mr. Herro who told

you about the rug being in this town, Mr. Bey?"

He looked at me questioningly. Then he nodded,

"You've known him for quite a while?"

"For some time."

"He's-not a disciple of yours."

He shook his head. "No. No, I'm afraid faith is not one of Mr. Herro's virtues." He looked down at his derby. "Why do you ask, Mr. Lee?"

"Just curious," I said. "And the name is Kaprelian, Mr. Bey, Lee Kaprelian. I'm the son of the man who owns that shop."

His smile was dim. "You were fortunate enough, it seems, not to have inherited his disposition. Good-evening, Mr. Kaprelian."

She went with him to the door. When she came back, her face was still grave. "Just a quiz kid, aren't you? I hope you have enough answers now."

Golly, she was beautiful as she stood there, looking down at me. To Papa, Berjouhi was beautiful, but no girl I was ever likely to meet could match Claire, I knew.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I came here, didn't I? I—worried about you. What did you expect, that I'd crawl? How truthful have you been through all this?"

"More questions," she said. "Allan had some, too, after you talked to him. He came up here screaming about the blood on that Bokhara."

Allan was Mr. Egan. I said: "Did you give him a satisfactory answer?"

She said tautly: "Yes. He trusts me."
"And Sergeant Waldorf trusts you?"
"He seemed satisfied."

"You're so beautiful," I said. "You're so damned beautiful. I wonder how your answers would sound if you weren't."

Her fact was white, her blue eyes blazed. "We've nothing to say to each other, Lee. Nothing can be gained by this bickering." There was the glint of tears in her eyes. "Oh, why did you have to come back?"

"I don't know," I said. "But I had to, Claire."

And she was in my arms again. She was sobbing in my arms and I was soothing her as well as I could, feeling soft and rotten. But way under the softness, the hard core of my skepticism remained.

I called up Mom and told her I wouldn't be home for supper. I went out and got a couple of steaks and some rolls. Claire broiled the steaks and we ate out on the terrace.

Later, we sat out there and watched the stars, watched the lights of the traffic below, watched the lights of the downtown section grow. There were things about this business I was to regret. There was nothing about the night I would ever regret or forget.

I like to think she'll never forget it either. Maybe, just because for those hours I didn't ask any questions. Or maybe because she'd felt, at least for the moment, some of the emotion many must have felt for her.

It was around midnight when the phone rang, and she went to answer it. It was for me.

It was Papa, "Levon, Selak is with you?"

"No. I haven't seen him. He left the store before I did. I didn't see him leave."

"Grace called, Levon. She's worried. He didn't come home."

"I've no idea where he could be," I said.

A silence on the wire. Then: "Well,

maybe it will be all right. Maybe he's with a friend somewhere." Another silence. "Berjouhi called, too."

"O.K., thanks. You'd better notify the police about Selak if he doesn't come home soon."

"That I'll do," he said, and hung up. Claire said: "What's happened, Lee." "Selak is missing." I told her.

"Selak?"

"Your silent admirer. That man who works for us, He left the store in a peeve this afternoon and he hasn't come home vet."

Her eyes were wide. "You don't think—" She looked around as though half-expecting to see him standing behind her. "I mean, the way he stared at me and—"

"Last night," I said, "he stood right down there across the street. When I left, he was sleeping in my car."

"He's-harmless, Lee?"

"He has been up to now. I suppose he still is."

We went out onto the terrace, but it wasn't comfortable out there any more. A wind had come to life from the north, and there was a chill to it.

In the living room Claire put a stack of records on the player and called to me: "Mix a drink, will you, Lee?" I shook my head. "I have to go. I'm

I shook my head, "I have to go. I'm worried about Selak. I'll see you in the morning, when I bring the rug over,"

"You're worried about that—that man? It's not your concern, Lee."

"Selak's always been my concern. It was my idea that my dad should hire him, and Grace, too."

She shook her head. "All right. It's been a grand evening. I suppose I shouldn't complain."

She came to the door with me and I kissed her. "Sleep tight," I said, "and dream of tomorrow."

She ruffled my hair. "Big day, tomorrow."

Big day, tomorrow. And a bad day, too, though I didn't know it at the time.

The downtown Western Union office was open all night, and it was from there I sent the wires. They were to some dealers I knew on the coast, and in them I inquired about Henri Ducasse.

The rain had started before I went into the telegraph office, and it was worse when I came out. The wind was cold; there was sleet mixed with the raindrops. Our false summer was over.

The wind howled down the Avenue, driving the rain before it. My little convertible was headed directly into it, and she shivered from time to time as the gusts hit.

It all shaped up. I'm no detective, but Ismet Bey had told me something that gave me a sequence. Tinker to Evers to Chance; was that the famous infield? Was that the triple play trio, or was it double play?

When I turned in the driveway, the lights were on in the living room and on the porch. I could see Papa in the living room talking to someone. When I came up on the porch, I could see who it was. Sergeant Waldorf. He was working late; it was after one.

His eyes appraised me as I came into the living room.

"Anything about Selak?" I asked

He shook his head. "The sergeant thinks it has something to do with Henri Ducasse. And you didn't tell him about the rug, Levon, about the Bokhara."

Waldorf still hadn't said anything. I said: "How about Dykstra? Have you talked to him?"

"Dykstra's in the clear all the way," the sergeant said. "I've no idea where that rumor started."

Papa said: "I told him it was Mr. Egan's rug, Levon. He's been checking Mr. Egan."

I looked at the sergeant. He was still

appraising me. I said: "You came here to see me, Sergeant?"

"More or less. Egan was in to see you just before you closed this evening, wasn't he?"

"That's right."

"What did he want?"

"That's a short question," I said, "but it would require a long answer. I'd have to give you some background first, Sergeant."

Somewhere a door slammed, and I could hear the wind roll the garbage can over.

"I've stayed up this long." Sergeant Waldorf said. "I may as well stay up a

little longer and hear your story."

I told him about Egan, Herro and
Bey. I told him some of the things about
Claire. Papa sat there while I talked and
missed none of it. The sergeant didn't

"And his wife knows he's selling

thcm?"
"He said she did. He said I could ask

her."
"Does his wife know Miss Lynne has them?"

"I don't know if she does or not."
"Does she know they planned to leave

town together?"

My heart stopped, I was sure. I couldn't get my breath for a second.

"You're kidding, Sergeant."
"No. but she might be."

"Mr. Egan's a—he's old," I said. "It doesn't make sense."

"The older the wackier," he said. "I'm no spring chicken, myself, but I can't think of anybody I wouldn't leave, if she wanted me to." His voice was weary. He rose. "Well, I'll see this Mrs. Egan tomorrow." He looked at me quietly a moment. "You want to come out on the porch a second?"

Papa frowned, but I said: "Sure."

Out there, the sergeant smiled. I could hardly hear his voice, above the sound of the rain and the wind. "Anything you want to tell me privately? How bad you might be involved. I mean?"

I shook my head. "I gave it to you straight, Sergeant. You're positive Dykstra's in the clear?"

"Positive. Nobody I'd rather nail, but he's clean."

"All day," I said, "I've been worrying about this. All day I've been hoping against hope that it was Dykstra. I don't know the man, so that wasn't fair."

Sergeant Waldorf was looking out at the rain. He seemed to be miles away. He said: "She's a beauty, kid. I've never seen anyone quite like her. Years ago, I felt as you do tonight, and this babe didn't have half of what that Lynne girl's got." He turned to face me. "I'll try to keep it as clean as I can. You ought to get an answer to those wires in the morning. don't you think?"

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I nodded.

He put a hand on my shoulder. "O.K. I'll see you in the morning. It's been a long day." Then he was trotting through the rain to the department car.

In the living room, Papa still sat in the chair he'd occupied through my recital. He looked at me sadly. He started to say something, then changed his mind. He rose.

"Time for bed, Levon," he said. "Another day, tomorrow."

Another day, big day, bad day . . . Outside, the wind grew stronger, and I wondered if Selak was out there somewhere in that wet, miserable night.

From upstairs, Mom called: "Is that you, Levon? Nishan, is Levon home?"

"Levon's home," Papa said. His voice was as sad as his face. I couldn't sleep that night. Didn't sleep. Laid down on the bed and thought about Claire. Sat up and watched the storm wear itself out, and thought about Claire.

I thought about Sclak, too, but mostly about Claire.

At breakfast Ann and Mom had enough to talk about, so my silence and Papa's wasn't so noticeable.

At eight-thirty, I was at the store. At

nine, Sergeant Waldorf came in. "You put in a long day, don't you,

Sergeant?" I said. "It's not usually this bad," he said. "I've just been over to Egan's. She knows, all right. He told her he expected to get at least five thousand dollars for that pile of rugs."

I shook my head.

"That seem reasonable to you?"

"There might be twenty rugs up there," I said. "I didn't count them, but that's a good guess, I'd say. I sold one of them vesterday. I sold it for seventyone hundred dollars, Sergeant,"

He whistled. He said: "Oh, oh." He shook his head, "So that's the angle. He gets a nice wad, clear, and he and Miss Lynne take off on the luxury trail. Or that's what he hopes, huh? She'd have the money, wouldn't she? And it might be good-by, Mr. Egan."

"I don't know." I said.

"You look tired, kid. No sleep?"

"No."

He went over to the window. It was a gray day, outside. The rain had stopped, but the chill was still with us.

"You didn't get an answer to those wires, yet?"

"Not vet."

vou know.

He turned. "I'm going out to get a cup of coffee. I'll be back before you leave with the rug."

There was one answer to my wires when he came back. It read:

Ducasse was out here in January and February. Made a few deals, but nothing sensational that I heard of. It's a bad town for orientals, as

Sergeant Waldorf looked at me when he'd finished reading it. "It still doesn't prove anything, I'll need more than that," He was looking thoughtful, "You take the rug up there and get your money from Bey. Find out what you can. I've an angle or two to check, vet."

He left then, and I went to the safe, got out the prayer rug. Papa came in as I was looking at it.

"Selak came home at three o'clock," he told me, "Grace called. He left again around six. Where do you think he goes?"

I shrugged, I said: "I'm going to take this rug up to Miss Lynne. I'll be back before lunch."

He nodded, saving nothing, He went back to the washing room, as I went out with the Maksoud masterpiece.

There wasn't much traffic; the weather was keeping the shoppers at home. I made time getting to the Towers, even though I was earlier than I'd promised.

George Herro was there when Claire

let me in. And so was Ismet Bey. We were all early.

The Turk's black eyes were gleaming as he looked at the rug. His face was en-

raptured.
"It's worth the money," I said.

He looked up at me. "Yes. About the

money. I said cash, I know. This is the same." He handed me the check.

It was a cashier's check for forty thousand dollars, on the First National Bank. It was made out to George Herro.

"You've made it out to Mr. Herro," I said.

He nodded quickly and his bird eyes were shadowed. "That was all right with Miss Lynne."

I looked at George Herro. "And it would be all right with you, too, wouldn't it?"

His hard old eyes met mine. "Why shouldn't it be?"

"You can prove ownership?"
"For heaven's sakes, Lee," Claire said.

"you're not going back to the questions again, are you?"

I didn't look at her. I continued to look at George Herro.

"What's on your mind, Lee," he asked.
"Murder," I said. "You didn't pick
this rug up at the auction, George, The

auction was in February. You were in Europe, then."

"Oh. Who did pick it up at auction?" "Henri Ducasse," I said.

Ismet Bey was looking at George. Then he was looking at me: "Henri Ducasse? He is the man who was murdered?"

I nodded. "He knew rugs, too. He knew he had a good buy. But he didn't know the history of this one. You did as soon as he showed it to you, George. And you can read Arabic."

George Herro was very quiet in his chair. The hardness in his face had brought out his age and his cynicism.

I looked at Claire and tried to smile.

"Baby, why don't you come clean?

You're in fast company with George. I
thought, at first, that the blood might
have got on that Bokhara at Egan's
house. But it was too much of a surprise to him. Ducasse was killied here,
wasn't he, in your dining room?"

She was ready to crack up, again, just as she had last night. Her face was tight, her body rigid, as she stared at me.

Herro said: "Mr. Bey, I believe our transaction is completed. Thank you very much for the check. And good-bye."

The little Turk gave us all one last glance before nodding. He folded the rug carefully and walked out. Nobody went to the door with him.

"And now," George said, "I'll have the rest of your ridiculous story, Lee."

"It's all guess work," I said. I paused.
"The first deal," I said, "was between
Claire and Egan. Egan wanted the rugs



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sold from here, so his wife wouldn't know what he was getting for them. You were called in, George, as the kind of salesman who could get the last dollar out of them. I'd say Ducasse heard about the deal and came here to chisel in on it. Henri was your biggest competitor, George, and he usually knew what you were doing. He brought the Maksoud piece along as an inducement, maybe, to let him in on the deal?"

Herro said nothing, nor did he move in his chair.

I looked at Claire. "That's right, isn't it?"

She nodded, still in that trance-like stage.

"For a rug like that one," I went on, "a man like you would go pretty far, George. As far as murder." And now I tried a lie. "We'll know if that was Ducasse's blood on the Bokhara. The police lab has a sample of the blood from the wash water, now."

That got to him. He stirred in his chair. He opened his mouth to say something, then closed it again.

I said: "You started the rumor about Dykstra among the dealers. You saw all the dealers from time to time, working on consignment as you do, and you started the rumor to throw Waldorf off the trail."

He said nothing.

"I don't know why Claire came down to the shop," I said, "but maybe it was at Egan's suggestion. Maybe she wanted an outside appraisal of those rugs, just to make sure you weren't holding out. And maybe they wanted a legitimate dealer in the business to give it some tone." I looked at her. "Was that it?"

I said: "You overestimate yourself, Claire. You're too young for a couple of old men like Egan and this one. You've been kidding yourself, Claire. You're too young and too soft."

She was crying. She said, "Lee, there

was nothing between us. They were—"
She put her face down into her hands.

"They were stooges, you thought," I finished for her. "Maybe Egan would be. But you don't know this Herro, baby. You don't know him like I do."

Herro's voice was an Arctic wind. "You don't know me well enough either, Lee. You didn't think I'd come to a deal like this unprepared, did you?"

He was still sitting in the chair. But now there was a gun in his hand. It was an automatic. It wasn't a big gun, but it was big enough to kill.

Claire looked up quickly and some ejaculation escaped her throat.

The guu was pointing at me. Herro said: "She won't talk as much as you hope for, Lee. She didn't see me kill him, but she knows I did. And that would get her some time in jail. She's too soft, you're right about that. Jail is rough on the soft ones." His smile was thin and cruel. "I'll take the check, now."

"Come and get it," I said.

"Don't fool with me, Lee. Bring it over."

Claire said: "Give it to him, Lee. You aren't involved in this. Don't get involved with him." Her voice was high.

In Herro's hand, the gun lifted. In Herro's eyes, I saw death. He would kill.

Then Claire was up, standing in front of me shielding me, facing the gun. "George, you'll get the check. Don't---"

That's when Selak walked in.

I'd left the door unlocked hoping Waldorf might break in on something incriminating. But I was glad to see anybody, including Selak.

He looked like a drowned grizzly bear. His face was black with beard, his rough hair matted, his dull eyes glaring. The gun, you see, was pointing at his Claire.

The sound that came from his big throat was nothing that could be called human, a rough, threatening grunt.

(Continued on page 127)

# GUN IN HIS BACK

By COLEMAN MEYER



HE white motorcycle rocketed to the crest of the grade and Patrolman Ben Scoggins sighed heavily as his wrist eased the throttle for the downhill run. Life, he reflected, was getting very complicated . . .

Abruptly and simultaneously he

clamped the front brake, swore under his breath, closed the throttle. A white patrol car loomed ahead and Scoggins remembered the Headquarters Bulletin;

"... And all such patroling, unless in actual pursuit or emergency, shall not exceed the lawful speed limit ..." He

The Inspector couldn't see Patrolman Scoggins for dust, so the police department was dumbfounded when Scoggins got the best Emily Post treatment from the Chief.

had forgotten that the inspector had stumped angrily away from that painful office scene slightly before him and that the inspector was headed north toward Richmond City.

The memory of the office scene brought red to his wind-burned features even as he was snubbing the plunging motorcycle. A couple of guys had heisted the Richmond City Bank this morning. The automatic procedures of the patrol had invoked a road block with cars and motorcycles at strategic points, a block that had been called off after the passage of an hour denoted that the bandits had somehow filtered through the twenty-mile screen.

And it had been highly unfortunate that their abandoned black sedan had been found a half-mile in on the road Scoggins was supposed to be blocking. Especially so since Joe Rivers' vineyard was three miles in on the same road and the presence of three pounds of grapes in Scoggins' saddlebags had proved difficult of explanation.

The inspector had been forthright and pointed; horribly so. And the actions he had so balefully discussed threatened short shrift to Scoggins' pleasant dreams of pensioned retirement two years hence.

The motorcycle pulled up slowly on the white sedan. It was proceeding at a sedate forty. Scoggins straightened his Sam Browne belt, shifted his holster to hang at the proper angle. He rode to the open driver's window. A man smoking a cigar was sitting alongside the inspector. There was another man, alone, in the black who waved in a friendly sort of fashion to the motorcycle patrolman.

The inspector looked over. Their faces were only a foot apart. "Ah, there -Scoggins," he said pleasantly. "How are you?" Then he smiled.

Scoggins restrained the abrupt wobble

of the motorcycle, brought it carefully back to the side of the car.

"Going to Richmond City to check in?" the inspector continued, almost

Scoggins nodded in dazed fashion.

"That's good," the inspector offered with a pleased air as though the fact that Scoggins was checking in furnished him with some small personal pleasure. Then he nodded at the others in the car. "Some men from the chief's office. I'm dropping them off. See you later." The white car slowed abruptly.

The motorcycle spurted ahead as Scoggins held it at a legal fifty-five. His sun-bleached brows drew down in bewilderment as deep-set eves watched his handlebar mirror until the white car had gone down to pin-point dimensions. Then he twisted the throttle to a quick seventy, held it there for a while. Maybe he had the fat boll-weevil all wrong. Maybe the guy wasn't such a jerk . . .

Two minutes later the thought struck him with the force of a blow, nearly unseated him from the motorcycle.

His big hand clenched the front brake. stretched the cable. The rear tire squalled from the pressure of a heavy

The driveway to Ranse Owens' place was narrow. Scoggins thought for a frantic moment that he wasn't going to make it as the bike skidded under fierce braking.

Ranse was out in the chicken vard. came walking over to the fence. "Hello, Ben-"

Scoggins was shouting even as he was getting the motorcycle turned around. His commands were urgent-explicit. Ranse listened intently, forebore even

a single question. He threw the feed pan down, departed for the house on the run.

Scoggins dropped in the clutch, roared back out the driveway.

E looked anxiously ahead as he hit the highway, breathed a sigh of relief. The inspector's car was still behind, couldn't possibly have seen him turn into Ranse's place.

Scoggins jumped on the clutch, burned rubber and went rapidly through the gears with a wide-open engine. He crouched low as the motorcycle plunged downgrade toward Richmond City.

The first corner, Scoggins felt sure, was not a ninety-mile-an-hour turn. He tightened down the steering damper, hoped that he was wrong . . .

Seven minutes and ten miles later he was still trying to get his heart back where it belonged. Then he saw what he was looking for. It was another white patrol car, coming toward him. He thought swiftly. It would probably meet the inspector's car within a few minutes.

Scoggins blinked his red lights with swift, imperious flashes, held up a free hand as he braked furiously with the other, crossed to the wrong side of the highway. The patrol car pulled to a stop on the highway shoulder. Sergeant Berry's head hung curiously from the window.

Engine still running, the beefy, redfaced patrolman shouted swift instructions.

Berry's face ran the gamut; puzzlement, smazement, comprehension and, finally, disagreement. His head started to negate. The motorcycle man didn't even pause to listen. He ran it all off in one breath, waved aside the dissent, shouted, "Sit tight—here!"

The motorcycle made crackling noises, squalled rubber and was gone, leaving a shouting sergeant talking to a tiny trail of smoke.

Berry returned to the car, started the motor indecisively once. Then he shut it off, sat rigidly in the seat.

Scoggins continued on a full mile, sur-

veyed the road carefully on both sides. He nodded to himself, stilled the motor-cycle on the highway shoulder, kicked out the sidestand. Then he rested on the saddle in the carefree attitude of a point man.

Ahead the road ran straight for another quarter-mile to disappear behind a hill. Beyond it, Scoggins knew, was Richmond City. At this point the concrete strip was almost levee in formation, dropping off sharply on both sides to fields considerably lower.

Scoggins' eyes were sharp in his rear view mirror. He twisted the handlebars slightly to bring the road behind into better view. Then his gaze alternated between the tiny four inches of glass and anxious looks ahead. Traffic of normal volume flowed by . . . .

It was just as his eyes identified the dot in the mirror that his ears caught the screech of brakes from up ahead. The funneling traffic stream showed frantic stoplights. Cars squealed rubber. The moving metal river ground to a heavy stop.

Scoggins looked around. The rear view mirror told him the moment. The white car shusshed to a stop, chrome bumper almost touching the rear fender of the motorcycle. Head turned over his shoulder, the patrolman watched it idly. His big hands were twisting at the front snaps of his belt.

The inspector scowled furiously from the window. "What's the meaning of this?" he demanded.

"Hell of a bad accident up ahead, Inspector," Scoggins called back with cheerful humility.

The man alongside the inspector rolled his window down. "So there's a bad accident—so you're sitting here! He gestured with the cigar. "By God, somebody's gonna hear about this! Get up there, get the road cleared!"

"Yes, sir!" Scoggins acknowledged the

order with alacrity. He swung a booted leg free of the motorcycle, bent over the machine for an instant. Then he pivoted, walked steadily back toward the white car, arms swinging free at his sides.

"Your belt—your gun . . ." the inspector goggled faintly.

tor goggied raintry.

"They're on the motorcycle," the patrolman nodded. He came to the window side, looked at the stilled traffic packed in behind the white car. "Look fellows," he continued easily, addressing the other two in the car. "So far it's only armed robbery. Nobody's been hurt. And the State won't hurt you. A stretch maybe, but that's all. That's a lot easier than the hot seat. And the but seat's a cinch if you get excited."

The man with the cigar clipped off an oath. "C'mere, copper—closer!" he ordered in a tight voice. He looked tensely ahead. There was no evidence of unusual interest in the cars to front or back—an officer striding to an official

car ...

Scoggins raised his hand very deliberately to sill level, rested them there. "Get smart."

"I am smart!" The man with the cigar leaned forward tensely. "Walk around slowly, copper. Slowly! Get in my side! In back. Do it easy—easy! Or the inspector gets a full clip right where it hurts—right in the belly!"

The inspector gurgled faintly. His

pop eyes closed.

Scoggins raised his uniform cap with meticulous care, wiped a hand across his brow. His fingers came away wet. "It's no good, guys." His voice was tightly casual. "I just looked back down the highway. There's a patrol car cross-ways on the road and a guy with a riot gun leaning over the hood. Up ahead—"he gestured toward Richmond City, "you couldn't get through with a helicopter."

"The hell you say," Cigar-face said grimly. He shot a swift look to the side of the highway, the far fields. "C'mon," he rasped to the man in the rear seat. "We make the side. We take these guys..."

Scoggins shook his head slowly. "It won't work," he grinned past the ashen face of the inspector. "It won't work." His head tilted a short invitation to gaze

out the window. "Look!"

The man in back grated: "Kee-rist!" Heads appeared over the bank where the highway grading dropped off, heads in felt hats. At eye level. And alongsielt each head appeared the slender spire of rifle barrel.

"See what I mean," the patrolman said brightly. He spread his big hands, palms up on the metal of the sill. "O. K. —so you blast and you make a couple of stiffs for the State—" He hunched his shoulders slightly. "It ain't no profit, guys. There'll be lots of stiffs. Everybody loses that way..."

After a moment he said quietly: "Good! Better come out now so I can look you over. Leave your hardware inside!"

HE inspector harummphed, harummphed. The sound filled the tiny office. There was a sly twinkle in the eyes of the gray-haired captain as they met Scoggins' glance and then returned to the portly frame in the chair. It still twitched at horrifying memory.

"One of them was lying on the highway when I came by. You know how it is now—nobody stops any more. They leave that for somebody official . ." A giant shudder shook the inspector's carcass. "The other man was concealed and when I stopped to investigate well, that was it. The one on front held a gun jammed in my side every instant, told me exactly what to say and how to say it. I tell you—" His head shook and another shudder rippled the fat body.

"But that was brilliant police work to have recognized those men from that meager bank description..." He looked up swiftly. "Scoggins—I'm putting you in for sergeant's grade!"

There was peace in the tiny office. The inspector had departed. The gray-haired captain looked quizzically at the patrolman. "What I don't see, Ben—" he began.

"Thad to get to Ranse's place and out again—quick," Scoggins interrupted. "Before the inspector's car caught up with me or before they saw me turn off the highway. Ranse catches on quick. Like I been trying to tell the inspector—the people in this county are my friends. He got on the phone, got the guys near Richmond City to snarl up the traffic with a couple of hayricks crossways on the highway. Then he got the others to pick up their bird guns and sort of assemble on both sides of the road."

"So you took your gun off . . .?
"What else could I do?" Scoggins

shrugged. "You know how itchy guys in a jam get. And the wrong move might have meant a dead inspector. Which might not," he added scratching his nose reflectively, "have been a bad idea."

He turned to leave.

The captain's voice caught him with his hand on the knob. "Ben," he mused. "I saw the teletype on those men. One five eight, a hundred and fifty. One five nine, one eighty. Nobody saw their faces. Tell me—how do you tell a guy is five feet eight inches and a hundred and fifty pounds when he's sitting down in a car?"

Scoggins looked over his shoulder, opened the door, peered cautiously out. He closed the door carefully, stood with his back against it. "Cap," he confided in a heavy whisper. "I wouldn't a knowed them guys if they was Clark Gable and Robert Taylor. All I know is—any time I ride up alongside the inspector and he says 'Good afternoon, Scoggins,' with practically joy in his voice, Cap—" he paused impressively—"somebody must have a gun in his back!"

### THE CODE OF CAPTAIN CORVAIN"

Corrain was neither an adventurer nor a hero. On that mid-June morning when the survivors of his regiment of "mixed colonials" were ordered to halt and dig in, he felt like a very tired, bewildered and frightened middle aged mans. But stomehow, the captain knew, he must recent the tattered remnants of his command—tattoord fashermen from the Niger, herders from the Soudan, soot-black Woloffs and Sonegalees, matter from the Chad and the Ubangi-from the issue of the German trap . . Don't miss this action-packed novelette of primitive warriors under mechanized battle-fire, by GROBESS SURDEZ.

Plus The first instillment of M. V. Herreden's "Bargain in Bombers"—a thrilling three-part serial set in the mountain festnesses of Central America. JOHN HETHERINGTON's "The Murders"—a they of a strange, manhunt in the







her new, proud typing. But the typewriter was empty. "Marcy," I said again, I threw my cap on the mangy sofa and tiptoed into the bedroom. A man was sitting motionless on the bed.

I took a step backward, my heart caught by surprise. He sat there as alert and unblinking as a rooster. He didn't move.

Something told me, though, that he wasn't a prowler. Or the gas man, or a plumber. He was too easy and sure. As if he had a right to be sitting in my tacky little flat. As if he had been waiting for me. The man was a police officer. A cop in soft clothes.

"Where is she?" I said.

The man didn't stir.

"Where is she!"

His voice was as stolid as he. "Where did you think she was?"

"Where did I think-why, here!"

"Where?"

"Here! Here. At home. Getting my breakfast . . . Where's Marcy?"

"Now, you didn't know she's in Emergency, did you? With a bullet in her head."

"No!" I said. "Oh, no!"

He was a broad, dish-faced man with a gray-streaked mustache. He wriggled his bottom comfortably on the bedspread. Vaguely I noticed that the bed had been made. As Marcy always made it, so tight a half-dollar would bounce. "What do you mean, no?" the man asked.

"I mean," I said, "what happened?"
"Let's you and me find out."

He slid off the bed and crossed the ratty mulberry rug to the door. Foolishly I picked up my cap and trailed after him. We pattered downstairs, through the reck of the Larsons' breakfast cod, and got into his car without speaking. He made a U-turn.

"What was she doing over on the Flats?" the cop said.

"Flats?" I echoed. Suddenly released, my fear and confusion made me boiling mad. "Quit asking questions! *I'm* asking questions!"

"You're Rex Tremain, ain't you? Your wife's name is Marcia May? She was over on the Flats this morning. Walking in Harm's Way. She got shot in the skull. How, we ain't sure. But I aim to find out."

"She's not-dead or anything?"

"Which way are you hoping? A guy and his dog found her. Did she work out on the Flats? Was she visiting somebody? Eight o'clock in the morning is a hell of a time to visit somebody."

"I don't know," I said. "I just got home from my route."

"What route?"

"Milk route. I'm a relief driver for Pagel's Dairy."

"Is your route near the Flats?"
"Flats? What are you trying to say,

you. . ."

He swung the car off Clybourn Avenue into the circular drive behind the Emergency hospital, "Shut up," he said.

and through some swinging doors. Two nurses and a white-shirted interne, dressed like a baker in summertime, were wheeling a hospital cart. On the cart lay a whiteswathed, motionless figure. "Is that her, Tremain" the cop said.

TE went up in an elevator

I could see only the lips and the tip of the nose. The lips didn't look as sweet as Marcy's. The cop nodded, and a nurse unwound some of the mummy wrappings. . . Her eyes were closed, her face shiny, her cheeks sunken.

The interne grabbed my shoulders. He was a powerful little guy. "You'll have to go now, buddy," he said. "Now!"

Shivering, I followed the cop down the hall to an alcove stuffed with wicker furniture. "Smoke," the cop said. "They're going to do a preliminary. I'll be back in an hour."

I didn't want to smoke, but obediently I lit my pipe. How long is an hour in a hospital waiting room? Much more than just an hour. Nurses flitted past on rubber soles. Over a loud speaker a genteel voice intoned: "Attention internes and residents, a pathological conference is now going on. A pathological conference is now. . ."

Marcy? What's a pathological conference? I started praying blind.

When the cop returned, even he walked on noiseless soles. "Let's go, Tremain," he said. We went down into

the sub-basement and through a dim tunnel. "But I've got to be there!" I said.

"They won't let you. The preliminary's over, anyway."

"Who did it? Who shot her?"

"Who?" the cop echoed.

We climbed rutted steps and passed through a barred door into a sour-smelling room. A stoop-shouldered policeman wearing a frayed sweater, with a couple of pounds of keys hanging from his belt locked the barred door behind us. The man who had brought me knocked on another door marked Captain Herbert.

I dropped on a scarred bench. I couldn't stop my pipe from rattling against my teeth. Four men trooped up the corridor and shook the barred door noisily. "Reporters," said the stoop shouldered cop sociably, getting up to admit them.

He jerked his head back at me. "That's the dame's husband." The reporters looked at me as if I were a freak. Incurious, unabashed looks. I wanted desperately to ask them questions about Marcy, but their look dried me up.

"You Rex Tremain?" one of them said.

I stood up. I don't know if I nodded or shivered.

"How old is she? The cops say twenty-one. Emergency claims twentyfive. What was she doing on the Flats?"

"She's twenty-four," I said. "We've been married two years. July second, nineteen-forty-six . . . Maybe she got restless again and went for a walk. . ."

"How do you mean, restless?" "We have only two and a half rooms,

and I'm away at classes. . ." "What classes? Ugly said you were a

milk driver." "Ugly?"

"Sergeant Gilogly. The Irish meatball. The cop that grabbed you-that notified you she was shot."

"I'm a student at Hauxhurst University. I drive a milk truck three mornings a week for Pagel's. . ."

"How do you mean, she gets restless?"

"Well, I'm always out on the route, or at classes, and when I'm home, I'm studying. So she doesn't have much fun and . . . Well, she takes long walks. . ."

"All the way over in Harm's Way? At eight in the morning?"

They looked at me, not believing anything. I said: "I never knew her to go to Harm's Way before."

"You got fifteen hundred dollars, Tremain?"

My pipe wouldn't hold still again, I looked down at my scuffed brown shoes, dyed black; my brown trousers, dyed black. Everything brown-dyed-black. "I've got eight dollars. Until Pagel's pays me thirty-six on Friday."

"You'd better have fifteen hundred." the reporter said.

They trooped to the barred door. They hadn't let me ask my questions. They hadn't even let me finish my answers to theirs. They were a pack of ghouls. "Damn vou!" I velled. "How is she?"

One of them turned around. The other three disappeared down the corridor. The one who came back to my scarred bench was youngish and smooth-faced, but gray-haired and a head taller than I.

He said: "They dug the bullet out. But that's only the easy half of it. She can't talk and maybe she'll be paralyzed, unless her head is sewn together right. Even if she lives. Excuse the plain talk."

"But who shot her?"

"Who knows? Personally I think she got hit by a stray shot. It was a twentytwo long rifle. It went in over her left ear. From the back, at an angle. Did you ever hear of Doctor Bart Mostel?"

"Mostel?" I said. "Mostel?"

"A brain surgeon. The best. It would

take fifteen hundred bucks to get Mostel here from Chicago. Maybe he could unscramble her brain."

At last I couldn't master the trembles at all.

"Can't you scare up fifteen hundred, Tremsin?" asked the reporter. "From your old man? Or hers?"

I tried desperately to sound as casual as he. As if things like this happened every day to me, too. "She has no family. My mother lives on what I manage to send her."

"You need fifteen hundred bucks for your wife, Tremain."

"But there must be some other doctor who'll do it! We're broke. She needs an operation. It's as simple as that."

"Some other doctor would be glad to try. Some guy with two left thumbs who'd like to see if he could do a carving job outside his jurisdiction. I know Mostel very well. He's the only man. Do you want her dead?"

EAR God, did I want. . Fifteen hundred dollars between Marcy and no Marcy. Fifteen hundred between me and no Marcy. . .

"The man who shot her can pay Mostel!" I said.

He said mildly: "Who is he?"

"I'll find him!" I said.

"Did you ever try to trace a stray shot, Tremain?"

I didn't answer him.

"You can't solve a thing like this just by dropping a nickel in a wishing well. It ain't that easy."

"I never had anything easy," I said bitterly. "But can't the cops do it? There's a gun club over on the Flata Gun club members usually are men with money. At least fifteen hundred dollars."

"Ugly checked the gun club. Nobody was shooting this morning." He looked at me curiously. "Cops are too busy to run down stray shots. You really going to try to trace it?"

"Do you think I want her dead?" I said.

"Well, good luck. I'm Kilarkin of the Times. Anything I can do, phone me at the press room in headquarters."

He didn't mean it. The cop wearing the keys let him through the barred door. I crossed the sour-smelling room and knocked on Captain Herbert's door. Sergeant Gilogly opened it.

"I'm going now," I said.

"That you are. With me."
We went down the rutted steps and

got into his car. He headed up Clybourn Avenue.
"You trying to find out who fired that

stray shot?" I said.

"Who claims it was a stray shot?"
"Kilarkin of the Times."

"He's smarter than me. He thinks."
We stopped at Pagel's Dairy garage.
"Get your time card," Sergeant Gilogly
said. "Where it shows what time you
started work today."

"Wait a minute! Are you saying I shot my wife?"

"Your time card."

I slipped it out of the wall rack and

he studied it. Rex Tremain: IN 5:28 A.M. OUT 9:14 A.M. "Let's make your rounds," Gilogly said. "Draw the truck you drove this morning."

"That'll take three hours!"

"The hospital won't let you see her anyway. No visitors. We can't even ask her what she was doing on the Flats at eight A.M."

Nailer, the garage foreman, issued my truck and we drove out to Route Fourteen. In almost a daze I stopped at the first gate and Gilogly went up to the house and talked with the woman. He came back.

"She got her milk O.K. this morning. So far so good. Let's go. And don't drive slower than you usually do."

"Say what you're thinking!" I said.
"Speak up like a man."

"Push off."

We ran my whole route. I scarcely heard what Gilogly said. All I could think of was: Marcy, Marcy, live! All the long hours of work and study, all the skimpy meals, all the exhaustion of body and nerves seemed to catch up with me at once. I wasn't sharp. I just wasn't sharp.

We got back to Pagel's at four, "Satisfied?" I said bitterly. He gave me his cold, unblinking rooster-look and climbed into his car.

I called the hospital on the garage telephone. The floor nurse said Marcy was no better, no worse. "What's that mean?" I said. "I'm coming up there." "No visitors, Mr. Tremain. Even vou."

Nailer, the foreman, was listening. For a head shocker he wasn't a bad guy. He gassed up a light panel job and handed me the key. "Bring it back whenever you're finished," Nailer said. "You must have things to do."

I couldn't think of anything to do but drive home. The flat was quieter than a cave. A shabby cave. Shabbier than ever without Marey there in her pink housedress, her only decent one. I perked coffee and ate some cold tapica pudding that I found in the icebox. I sat down at the typewriter. It was our one extravagance. She'd rented it for me to type my schoolwork on, and she'd taught herself how to type on it. Twisting a sheet of paper into the machine I wrote: \$1,500. It might as well have been a million. I kept hitting the zero key: \$1,500000000000...

How do you start tracking the man who fired a stray shot into your wife's head? If it had been a stray shot. What was Marcy doing in Harm's Way? At eight in the morning. Just walking or meeting someone? A woman, or a man? Who had seen her fall? Who had found her lying there? A man and his dog, Gilogly had said.

I went down the fishy staircase and called the press room on the wall tele-

# to relieve that BACKACHE



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phone. It sounded as if I had interrupted a crap game, but finally Kilarkin of the *Times* came to the phone.

"Who was that man with the dog?" I said.

I heard him shuffling papers. He sounded annoyed. "His name was Sal LoCoco, 9187 Harm's Way. He found her on the road opposite the golf club."

er on the road opposite the goir ci "You mean the gun club."

"Golf club. There's a private golf club out there too."

It was five in the afternoon when I found Sal LoCoco, washing his 1941 Chevvie in the alley behind his house. An Irish terrier pup squatted in the shade of the garage doors. LoCoco wiped his fingers on a wad of waste and we shook hands. He was a swarthy, raw-boned young man with hair that looked like a black strawstack.

"Be finished in a minute," LoCoco said. "Then we'll take a ride out there." He cut some strips off a roll of white adhesive tape and pasted them on the doors of his car. They formed the words: VETERANS CAB. "I pick up a few nickels hacking nights," he explained.

We whistled the Irish terrier into Pagel's truck and headed out Harm's Way. The houses grew wider apart until, at Ninety-third Street, which was the city limits, they practically disappeared.

I read the speedometer. "This is nine and three-tenth miles from our house," I said. "I can't imagine her walking it."

"She got hit about two miles farther out," LoCoco said. "Could be she rode the bus as far as Ninety-third. The bus line runs farther, clear out to Prothero. That's the railroad's big switching yards. But you got to pay an extra zone fare to stay on the bus after Ninety-third. Maybe she got off there and started walking."

"But where would she be walking to?"

"There's nothing out here except the
gun club and the golf club and Prothero

yards. A swamp and some woods. . . Pull up here."

I stopped on the shoulder and we got out. "Here." LoCoco pointed. "She fell here."

#### CHAPTER TWO

#### Sand Trap

DIDN'T want to look but I did.

There was nothing to see but a sanded spot on the concrete.

Aside from the private golf course the area was desolate. Harm's Way was a causeway running due north across the Flats, elevated perhaps twelve feet above the surrounding land. Over east the choppy lake glittered in the sunlight like a teaspoonful of diamonds. On the shore, among the sand dunes, the gun club nestled. Between the gun club and Harm's Way ran the railroad spur linking the main line with Prothero yards. A thin row of elms and catalpas stood between the highway and the tracks.

To the west lay the golf course, dotted with clumps of trees and cut up into squares of various shades of green. Above a roll in the land I could see the red tile roof of the clubhouse. Between Harm's Way and the golf course stretched an elongated swamp bordered by scummy-kneed willow trees. A neck of the swamp extended partly into the course, with a curving rustic bridge over it so the golfers could cross from the sixteenth hole to the seventeenth tee. There was a tiny rustic storm shelter near the bridge.

I thought: What a place to get hit. Even the red-winged blackbirds fluttering in the swamp couldn't make the slimy place look pretty.

"Tell me," I said.

LoCoco pointed at his Irish terrier. "His name is Goofer. Once in a while I bring him out here and let him scare up

woodchucks or rabbits on the gun club side. He don't go in the swamp because there's water snakes. We were walking back this morning, maybe three hundred yards north of here, when I saw her fall. I ain't sure I even heard the gun. She was walking north, toward us."

"The bullet hit over the left ear, from the back. It must have come from those fields south of the golf course. Did you see anybody in the fields?"

"Nobody." LoCoco said. "But your figuring ain't necessarily right. It was windy this morning, out of the north. She kept turning her head, maybe so her eyes wouldn't water. I did the same thing when I came out earlier. Maybe she was even walking backward when it hit. That would make it the gun club side. I ain't sure because I wasn't looking at her right at that minute. I only noticed her far off because of her hat."

"Pink," I said. "She bought it yesterday. First one since we were married."

"It sure was an unlucky hat."
"Was there anybody else on the road?"

"Yes," LoCoco said.

"Who?"

"A man was walking behind her about two hundred yards. I didn't get a good look at him, but I'm sure he didn't have a gun. When she dropped he just stood still like a sombie. Then he ran. Maybe he was a bum or had a record and didn't want any questions asked. I don't know where he faded to. I legged it up the road to reach her, and I forgot about him."

"Don't you know what he looked like?"

LoCoco inspected me carefully. "Sergeant Gilogly already questioned me, Mac. Now I know why he asked if the guy was about five-seven and wore a milkman's cap."

I said bitterly: "But it wasn't me, was

"I don't know, Mac. I didn't get a good gander. I'm sorry."

We got back into Pagel's truck. "I want to see who's at the gun club," I said. I swung the truck under the arch and bumped down toward the lake. LoCoco stayed in the cab and I walked around the clubhouse. A man in overalls was calking a rowboat inverted on two sawhorses.

"I'm looking for the manager or the caretaker," I said.

"Tm them," the man said. "Will Varmes is the name." He didn't stop calking. He was a gaunt man about thirty-five years old with a brick red sunburned face and eyebrows bleached pink.

"That woman who was shot up on the road. . ."

"Now, I've gone all over that! Nobody's been shooting at this club since last evening. Nobody! I already told that to the cops. And nobody's going to prove any different!"

I got as testy as he did. "Don't bet that nobody will prove it! What makes you so sure there wasn't any firing on your range? Were you here all the time?"

"I'm here more than I'm anywhere else! And I say she wasn't hit by any stray fired off our range. We got rules against things like that. What's it to you, anyway? You're no cop, you're a milkman."

"I'm her husband. And I'm going to find the guy who shot her!"

"Going to give him a beating?"

"Yes. For running away. At least, he's going to pay her doctor bills."

Varnes stopped calking and looked at my uniform cap. He said: "How you going to trace him?"

"I'm going to question every soul in this neighborhood. I'll get transferred to this route if necessary. Somebody knows something. It's just a question of finding who."

"Well, I don't know anything," he said, nettled. He picked up a handful of rope, dismissing me. I went back to the truck.

LoCoco asked: "Any luck?" I shook my head and turned the truck around. When I delivered him at his house he shook hands again and said, "If there's anything I can do." He meant it a little more than Kilarkin of the Times had.

I drove back to Ninety-third and telephoned the hospital from a chuck wagon. The night nurse gave me no more information than the day nurse had. Mrs. Tremain is no better, no worse. I hung up and ordered some pie and coffee. It left me with seven dollars and sixty cents. I was forty cents further away from the fifteen hundred dollars and Dr. Mostel than ever.

S much as anything I wondered what Marcy had been doing out in Harm's Way, eleven miles from home. If she had gone to meet someone, who was it? At eight in the morning, in such a desolate swampland. . .

Assume she'd ridden the bus to the city limits. Assume it had taken her a half hour to walk to where she'd been hit. Then she must have got off the bus at Ninety-third Street about seventhirty. Maybe the bus driver would remember her. Or her pink hat.

I spent another nickel to telephone Al Rogers' house. Al drove Route 31, which took in this neighborhood. Maybe he'd

noticed Marcy himself.

"She wore a pink hat, Al," I said. "Brown coat, brown shoes. A girl about five-four. Nice legs."

"I'd have remembered the legs," Al said. "But I don't."

"Do you know the bus drivers who pull into Ninety-third about seventhirty?"

"It could be any one of three drivers,

Rex. Look in the phone book for Tom Shevlin or Jerry Sloan. They live somewhere on the West Side. I only know the third guy as Bud, but Shevlin or Sloan could tell you where to reach him."

"I'm obliged, Al."

"And listen, Rex. There's an old gaffer named Mannix lives out Harm's Way a couple blocks. Last house on the left, a little stone place. He's a retired tuck pointer, Always prowling around, Never misses a trick. Maybe he can help. Anyway, if you're feeling low he'll give you a snort of his elderberry wine."

"I'll try him, Al."

"If there's anything I can do," Al said. He sounded as if he meant it.

I got the telephone directory and some more nickels. Tom Shevlin was out bowling but his wife gave me Jerry Sloan's number. Sloan didn't remember Marcy, but he knew the number for the third driver, a man named Emory Budlong, I called Budlong.

"Pink hat and brown coat?" Budlong said, "B'god, I figured that was the girl! I read about it in the paper tonight and I had a hunch that was the girl." I could hear him chattering an aside to his wife: "This guy's her husband." "Where did she get aboard?" I asked.

"I don't remember, but she got off at Ninety-third. I pull in there at seventhirty-four. She asked how much the extra zone fare was. I guess she didn't want to pay the dime. Anyway, she started walking."

"Did you see her again?"

"I passed her in Harm's Way and went out to the end of the run at Prothero. A gang of railroad guys got off and I started right back. I passed a young fellow walking his dog, then her, then another guy hiking behind her, pretty far back."

"Did you get a look at that last man?" "I wouldn't know him again from a hale of hav."

"Was he carrying a rifle?"

"I guess not, or I'd remember him."

"Was he wearing a railroad man's cap, or gauntlets?"

"He's a blank to me," Budlong said.
"Was there anybody on the gun

"Nobody. There were a couple golfers over west, and a switch engine moving slow along the spur, down in the hollow."

"Listen," I said. "Did she look—well, restless? Or unhappy? When she got off the bus, I mean."

"No," Budlong said. "She was smiling and sort of excited."

"Excited?"

"Like she had some place important to go and wanted to get there right away."

"Oh," I said. "Well, when she asked about the zone fare, how did she say it. Did she ask how much the fare was to the gun club, or to Prothero? Did she say it like that?"

I had to wait for Budlong to remember. "She just said, 'How much does it cost to stay on?' Or to keep riding. Something like that."

"Has a cop named Sergeant Gilogly talked to you?"

"No."

I don't know why that gave me satisfaction. I said: "Thanks, Mr. Budlong." "Anything else, just call on me, Tre-

I went out and turned Pagel's truck north in Harm's Way. She left the bus at seven-thirty-four and started walking, looking excited. What was Marcy excited about?

An old man was sitting on the steps of the little stone house. He wore a white shirt and black patent leather tie and his pink face was newly shaven. Marcy would have said: What a clean old man.

I introduced myself, and Mr. Mannix said: "Sit down, my boy. A black day, hey?"

"I'm trying to trace that stray shot. Al Rogers suggested you might have an idea."

"I got no ideas. You know what I mean is?"

"No. What do you mean?"

"I mean I didn't notice anything unusual."

"Isn't a woman getting shot unusual around here?"

"But shooting ain't. You know what I mean is? Every fellow around here does some shooting. Even I still do. You want to see my rifle? It's a old Savage, takes a 308 cartridge. The papers say your wife stopped a .22 long. Could you use a snort of elderberry wine?"

He poured the wine out of a green

## PSORIASIS - is it a SKIN disease?

After years of research, many nored medical scientists have reached an opinion that Positiasi results from certain internal disorders. A number of physicians have for the last five years been reporting satisfactory treatment of this malady with a new formula called LIPAN-taken internally. LIPAN, a combination of glandular substances and visamins, stracks what is now believed to be the internal cause of Prorisatis, and trends to aid in the digestion and assimilation of foods. LIPAN is harmless, non-habit forming, and can be taken with confidence by both young and old. Physician inquiries are invited. Ask your druggist for LIPAN or write us direct for free booklet. Or, order a month's supply of LIPAN—bottle containing 180 tablett at once, enclosing check or money order for \$8.50.

Spirt & Company, Dept. PF-11, Waterbury, Conn.

bottle. It made me feel even worse, light-headed but no lift. I said: "I still think it came from the gun club."

"No shooting there this morning," Mr. Mannix said. "Heard some on the rail-road tracks, though, /There's an old fellow works on the road has fun shooting varmints from the caboose. Hawks, crows, pine squirrels."

I set my wine glass on the step. "Can I use your telephone? I want to check the railroad for his name and address."

"Don't need to check," Mr. Mannix said mildly. "Name is Frank Hess. Lives out in Prothero. Big yellow frame place across from the roundhouse. Don't mention I sent you. Know what I mean is?"

Dusk was fading into dark when I found the yellow house, set in an acre of velvety lawn. Frank Hess, rocking in a porch swing, was a rugged, beetle-browed man of about sixty.

"For one thing," he said, "I never shoot toward the road when there's somebody on it. For another, I use the proper load. A twenty-two long can be dangerous for danged near a mile. And for another thing, I been shooting varmints for forty years and I don't fire strays. When I shoot I hit."

"Isn't there a law against shooting from a train?"

from a train?"

He said guardedly: "You may be right. But the point here is did I shoot

"Were you using a twenty-two today?"

Hess grumbled. He went into the yellow house and came back with a rifle. "It's a Winchester 59. Shoots a twentytwo. Want to take it down to headquarters and have the ballistics men test it?"

I hesitated.

your wife?"

"Go ahead, if it will make you happier. But it's already been tested. Jack Gilogly, the cop, was out here today. Your wife wasn't hit with my rifle."

T WAS ten-thirty when I parked the truck in the lot next to the flat. I went up to the shabby flat and snapped on the light quick and stood there for a minute, feeling as lonely as I ever hope to be. I looked into the bedroom, half-expecting to see the dish-faced Sergeant Gilogly sitting as

alert as a rooster on our bed.

The sheet of paper was still in the rented typewriter, \$1,50000000000. There were no sounds but the creak of the floor when I walked. Even the tinny clock had run down. I roamed around restlessly for a while, looking down at the ratty carpet, my brown shoes dyed black, my brown trousers dyed black. It was the first time since we'd been married that we were apart at nightfall.

A copy of the Times from the day before lay scattered on the sofa. I smoothed it out and started reading. Nothing made sense for more than a paragraph. I skipped to the comies. There was a hole in page 23, about three inches square, as if someone had slashed out the piece with a pin. On the reverse side was the beginning of the want-ad section.

I tore out the page and went down to Larson's apartment and knocked until the old man opened up. "Yesterday's Times?" he said, yawning. "Come in, Rex, and have a beer while I look around."

I got two cans out of the refrigerator while Larson sleepily pawed through the book case, the magazine basket, the welter of junk on the table. Finally he found it. I fitted my page of the *Times* over page 24 of Larson's *Times*.

The boldface heading read: HELP WANTED. The third ad read: "Typist and clerk. Experienced or beginner. 40 hr. week; good pay. No Sundays. Hosp. and life ins. Apply Mr. Stanhope, Harm's Way Golf Club, after 8:30 A.M."

The beer glass was trembling in my

hand. A different kind of shakes, though. Not that this meant much, but now I knew what Marcy had been doing on the swampy Flats at eight in the morning. Which was a hell of a time to go visiting. She'd wanted to be first in Mr. Stanhope's line of applicants. She'd taught herself to type on our extravagantly rented mill, and now she was going to earn some money to help us. She hadn't gone there for any of the reasons which I'd refused to admit to myself.

Larson gave me five nickels for a quarter and I telephoned the golf club. "Don't you know what time it is?" a sleepy voice demanded. "Stanhope will be here at half-past eight in the morning. What do you want?"

I didn't tell him. I hung up and called Emergency. Marcy's floor nurse said there was no change. "Can't I come down and see her?" I said. "I'll just stand in the doorway."

"If I made the rules, Mr. Tremain, you could. But I just enforce them. We'll call you if there's any change, either way."

Back up in the flat I tried hard for an hour to go to sleep. Something was missing, besides Marcy. Then I realized it was the tinny clock, now silent. I wound it, and pretty soon I dropped off, thinking: She was just on her way to get a job. Just a job.

When I woke up I felt embalmed. It was six-forty-five and already sunny. I checked the hospital again and got the no-change routine. I pulled the truck out of the lot and drove up to Ninety-third. Al Rogers' truck was parked near the chuck wagon and he was sitting at the counter, talking to a man with a brick-red sunburned face and eyebrows bleached pink; Will Varnes, the gun club caretaker.

Varnes remembered me. He said: "How you making out?"

"I got a good lead," I said. "At the golf club."

Varnes paid for his breakfast. "Just so you get the gun club out of your head. I promise you nobody was shooting there yesterday morning." He shook hands with me. "Good luck, Tremain. If I hear anything, I'll let you know right away."

Al Rogers offered to buy my breakfast. "You look even skinnier than usual," he said. He stayed around for a while, trying to cheer me up, but then he had to go back to the job.

At eight-fifteen I drove out Harm's Way to the golf club. Mr. Stanhope kept me waiting a half hour. He was a large, florid man with an harassed expression. He talked in nervous spurts and swore a lot. A blue-eyed cat prowled around the office as if he owned it.

"That was a hell of a note," Stanhope said. "Is she O.K.?"

"I don't know. She had a preliminary operation but she'll need another one. Did she ever get here to see you?"

"I didn't even know until now that she was headed here. As far as I know she never reached the club." Stanhope batted the cat off his desk. "If I can do anything," he said.

"The bus driver saw some golfers on the course. If you could figure out which of them were likely to be near the road, maybe they saw something..."

Stanhope took some papers from a drawer and skimmed through them. "These are the reservations for yesterday. It's possible, from the starting times, that Mr. Fee and Mr. Albright were on the sixteenth or seventeenth about that time."

"Where could I find them?"

"At their office. Willard Fee and Henry J. Albright. They're partners in an investment business. Sometimes they play a round before they go to the office."

#### CHAPTER THREE

Clay Pigeons and Dead Ducks

EFORE starting back to town I walked across the course to the sixteenth green. The sun was strengthening and I sat down or a log in the shade of the rustic storm shelter, cooling off. The red-winged blackbirds in the swamp were beautiful to watch. I went out on the bridge over the swamp neck and looked at Harm's Way. The curve of the bridge raised me to eye level with the causeway. If Marcy had fallen while Mr. Fee and Mr. Albright were on the bridge, they could have seen her. But if they weren't on the bridge at that moment, she was out of sight.

The blackbirds didn't seem to mind the swamp smells. I heaved a stick at them to keep them fluttering. They darted around but were back rocking on their reeds even before the stick sank into the muck. I took off my coat and hiked back across the sunny fairways to Pagel's truck.

Fee and Albright, Inc., had offices in the Flat Iron building. Mr. Fee was out, so I left my name for Mr. Albright. He was a pink-cheeked man with graying black hair, wearing a suit of big-shot blue. His elevator shoes made him walk a little like a guy with two artificial legs. His desk was a busy man's fortress of telephones and buzzers, but he didn't rush me.

"We didn't see her," Albright said.
"Didn't even hear a shot. Perhaps we had driven the seventeenth by that time."

"Did you see a man walking north on Harm's Way about two-hundred yards south of the bridge?"

"All I recollect was a bus turning in from Prothero."

"How about Mr. Fee? When will he be in?"

"He went to Pittsburgh on business. We expect him back Friday. Why don't you come in Friday about eleven o'clock?"

I didn't know where to go from there, so I went to the hospital. They let me stand in the doorway, but all I could see were bandages and blankets.

I went around the corner to the press room in headquarters. Kilarkin of the Times was sitting in a casino game but he threw in his hand and came over to talk with me. I told him what I'd been doing.

"I think you're foolish," Kilarkin said. "Never mind who shot her. Concentrate on getting fifteen hundred bucks for that operation. Now what are you fixing to do?"

I still had about seven dollars. "I'm going to phone Mr. Fee in Pittsburgh. I can't wait until Friday."

"Call his house first," Kilarkin advised. "Find out what hotel he's staying at. Maybe I can put the Pittsburgh call on my expense account so it won't cost you anything."

A young woman at Mr. Fee's house, perhaps his daughter, gave me the name of the Pittsburgh hotel after I carefully explained my story. Kilarkin put in the Pittsburgh call, but Mr. Fee wasn't registered yet, although he had a reservation.

The shakes were bothering me again. "I told you my luck was all black," I said bitterly. Kilarkin didn't answer. He sat on the window sill, studying the paper-cluttered floor. Another reporter pulled out of the casino game and came over to the window.

"What's cooking over here?" he asked casually.

"Nothing," Kilarkin said. "We were just going to lunch."

He took me downstairs but we didn't go to lunch. Kilarkin made some calls in a telephone booth. Presently he came out. "Fee had a reservation on a G&V train leaving for Pittsburgh at ten o'clock yesterday morning. But he didn't use it." Kilarkin looked past me, over my shoulder. "Did your wife know Fee?"

"Wait a minute!" I said.

Kilarkin shrugged. "I'll look around further. Keep in touch. And you really ought to get my old friend Mostel up here."

I went down to the hot street. Now where? I couldn't think of any better place, so I drove over to Pagel's garage. Nailer, the head shocker, said: "Call Al Rogers right away." He handed me a slip of paper on which was written Mr. Mannix's name and number, I called it.

"Rex!" Al said excitedly. "Guess what, boy? I found the guy!"

"What guy?" I said.

"The guy that shot your wife. A kid, about ten years old. He was shooting blackbirds in the swamp and a shot went wild."

"A kid? No, Al!"

"He admits it. Come on out. I'm holding him here."

All the way out to Mr. Mannix's stone house my heart stayed in my boots. How was I going to get Dr. Mostel's \$1,500 from a ten year old kid? Unless his father was fixed to pay it....

Al Rogers, Mr. Mannix and Frank Hess, the railroad man, were sitting on the stone porch. Hess' train was standing in the hollow across Harm's Way, lazily smoking.

The kid was a brown-haired, pale youngster wearing patched jeans, scared as a rabbit.

"Now, don't whap him," Al Rogers greeted me. "It was an accident. He was afraid to admit it before now. His ma made him."

The boy was quivering as badly as I was when he handed me the rifle. It looked expensive, polished and shiny and well-cared for.

"Show me how you did it," I said.
"Show me where you were standing and how you aimed and fired."

Old Man Mannix admonished the kid: "Be careful, Artie. You're too little to handle a weapon like that." Aside, he whispered to me: "His name is Artie Bliss. Lives with his ma behind the golf club. She's a widow. You know what I mean is?"

The boy eyed me nervously. I said:
"Take it easy, son. Just pretend that
the lady was walking over near that
tree. Where were you standing and how
did you shoot?"

He took a bead on the tree and let fly. The bullet whined off into the vacant fields. Frank Hess said: "Do that again, kid."

"Once is enough," I said. "He can shoot the thing, that's all that was bothering me."

I handed the rific to Al Rogers. "Al, will you take it to Sergeant Gilogly! Have him check it with the bullet that hit Marcy." I motioned to the boy and we got into Pagel's truck. "Why did you turn yourself in?" I said:

"My mother made me. She told me to go find the milkman and confess. I guess I got the wrong milkman, I got Mr. Rogers."

Y HEART sank even lower when I saw the boy's house. Unpainted, tilting, scuffed bare earth for lawn, a half dozen hounds scratching themselves on the porch. The odor of cabbage soup was heavy in the hall.

His mother was a blonde who hadn't been to the drug store lately. Her clothes looked nothing like Marcy's but they were just as cheap.

She said nervously: "Will they arrest him? I don't know what I can do. How is your wife? I mean, I haven't any money. . . ."

"How could you afford such an expensive gun for him?"

"I didn't. It was a present."

The kid said: "My uncle gave it to me."

"His Uncle Chris, in Des Moines," Mrs. Bliss said. "I shouldn't have let him use it."

I said heavily: "The police will make tests. Maybe it isn't the rifle, after all. I hope not. I certainly hope not!"

"Will the police give the gun back?" Mrs. Bliss asked. "I'd certainly like to have the gun back."

"The devil with the gun!" I said.

I drove back to Mr. Mannix's and he brought out the green bottle. After a snort of elderberry wine I telephoned the hospital. No change. Then I called Kilarkin.

"Listen, Tremain," he said angrily. "I thought we were stringing together on this. Why send that rifle to Gilogly? That way, all the reporters get a crack at it. I want this exclusive . . . That was the rifle, all right. Gilogly says it's the one that shot your wife."

"Oh, lord!" I said. "The kid's mother hasn't got a dime. That just about shoots the fifteen hundred dollars for Dr. Mostel."

"That's a pretty dukey gun for a poor kid to carry."

"His Uncle Chris in Des Moines sent it to him." "Well, keep checking direct with me,

I'm going to do you a couple favors, so give me what you get exclusively. I'm still trying to find Willard Fee for you."

"What good is Fee now?" I said. "So long."

Mr. Mannix set down his glass of elderberry and said: "I doubt if Artie's Uncle Chris ever sent him a package of gum, let alone an expensive rifle."

"His mother said he got the rifle from his uncle."

"I'll bet she got it from her boy friend. The kid calls her boy friend his uncle. You know what I mean is?"

"Who's her boy friend?"

"A fellow named Varnes." "Who?"

"Will Varnes. He manages the gun club." Mr. Mannix sipped his elderberry, "Remember Frank Hess wanted Artie to shoot the rifle again? Know why? Hess and me been handling guns for forty, fifty years . . . And I'll give you odds that kid never shot a gun before today. Not if he can't hit an oak tree at that distance."

I said: "What do you make of all this?"

"Put it together, son. Gun club members are always giving Varnes busted guns or guns they don't like. It's logical he might give one to Sadie Bliss' boy. But why didn't she say so? You imagine she wants to keep Varnes out of this for some reason?"

"Excuse me." I said. "I'm going to the gun club."

Was Will Varnes the man who had been walking behind Marcy? Neither Sal LoCoco nor Emory Budlong had seen a rifle in the man's hands. Yet Varnes must be a steady traveler of Harm's Way between his home and the gun club.

Perhaps if LoCoco or Emory Budlong saw him it might freshen their memories . . .

Instead of turning toward the club I sent Pagel's truck roaring toward Ninety-third Street. A bus was pulling out for Prothero vards, and I honked and waved until the driver stopped. I ran across the road and asked: "Are you Emory Budlong?"

"I'm Tom Shevlin. Bud is due here in fifteen minutes."

I went into the chuck wagon and looked up Sal LoCoco's number. A woman who spoke with a heavy accent,

perhaps his mother, answered. "Salvatore sleep. He work night shift tonight."

"Wake him up," I said. "Tell him Rex Tremain needs him out on Ninetythird. He'll come."

I waited on the corner until Emory Budlong rolled his big bus to a stop. He was a burly young guy with a thin nose that somebody had bent to the left for him. I introduced myself.

"All I want you to do," I said, "is stop at the gun club and take a look at the manager. Stall him for a drink of water or something. I want to know if he's the guy who was walking behind my wife."

"I doubt if I'll remember him," Budlong said.
"Try it anyway, will you? If you

recognize him, step on the brakes a couple times. I'll see the tail lights flashing. If not, just pull ahead."

The shakes were coming back strong as I watched Budlong drive away. I could see his bus stop, I watched him walk down the road to the clubhouse. Then he disappeared. While I waited, Sal LoCoco drove up in his 1941 Chevie with the white adhesive tape signs: VETERANS CAB. He was sleepy-eyed and his hair looked even more like a black strawstack. We shook hands.

Budlong trudged back to his bus and pulled away without flashing his stop lights. He hadn't recognized Varnes.

ights. He hadn't recognized Varnes.

"O. K., Sal," I said. "Now you."

While he was gone I had a cup of

while he was gone I had a cup or coffee and an aspirin in the chuck wagon. He came in shaking his head. "No use, I didn't notice the guy in the first place . . . But I gave that gun club guy a ride in my cab last night, though."

"Where did you take him?"

"He hailed me right out front here. I drove him over on Military Road. A dollar haul."

"What address?"

"He didn't ask for any address. Just a corner. Military and Bayshore. He said I shouldn't wait."

"Lead me there," I said.

I stayed close on the Chevvie's tail across town. LoCoco led me east around the lake, where the big estates started. We climbed out at Military and Bayshore.

"Which way did he walk?" I said.

"He was still standing on the corner when I pulled away."

I walked down Bayshore for one block, just looking around, but the street came to a dead end. Then I came back and tried Bayshore in the opposite direction. Most of the grounds were enclosed by brick walls, with the names of the estates on the gate posts instead of house numbers. Branches extended over the walls shading the street.

The sign on the gate at the end of the second block read: SANDY POINT. Under it in smaller letters was: Henry J. Albright.

Sal LoCoco was leaning on a fender of the Chevvie when I loped back. "Hide the cab," I said. "I've got to make a phone call."

DROVE Pagel's truck up Military
Road until I found a drugstore.
I was afraid of what I was doing.
Unsure, excited, not sharp at all. I

wished Kilarkin of the *Times* was with me. Even Sergeant Gilogly, the Irish meathall.

I dialed the gun club. When Varnes answered I said guardedly: "This is Albright. Come out to my house right away."

His voice sounded shocked. "But you said I shouldn't come there again!"

"Never mind what I said. Come running. We're in trouble."

I hung up.

Albright and Varnes? What if Varnes was smart enough to check back? What

if he phoned Albright's house or office to make sure the call was on the level? I got scared again . . . To hell with being scared. I needed \$1,500 for Marcy.

I dropped another nickel and called Kilarkin. He said: "Where've you been, Tremain. I've got news for you."

"You located Willard Fee?"

"No. But this news is good . . ."
"Marcy's better!"

"Not yet . . ."

"Then you haven't any good news I want to hear. Listen, maybe I'm in a jam. Meet me at the gun club at four o'clock."

"Tremain! Hev!"

Sal LoCoco had stashed his cab around a corner from Henry Albright's house. I hid the truck and joined him in a shaded driveway.

"What are you doing, Mac?" he

"Shaking."

"I don't know what you're up to, but it's O.K. with me. Maybe I'm psychiatric, or something but ..." He pulled a .45 automatic out of his shirt front. "Moonlight issue when I was in the army. I carry it in the glove compartment, Want it?"

"Thanks," I said. "I ended up with just a camera."

In the leafy driveway we waited about fifteen minutes. Then a cab pulled up at the gate post of Sandy Point. Will Varnes stepped out, paid the driver and disappeared through the gate. So he hadn't checked back on my call. When the cab drove off I nudged LoCoco and we slipped down the street to the gate. "Hard one of the lower of the street to the gate."

"How'd you get him out here?" Lo-

Coco asked.

"Fear," I said. "Fear lends intelligence even to fools. My old man was fond of quoting that. Until now I never knew what it meant."

Varnes stayed in the big house less than five minutes. Then he came back

down the walk and turned at the gate, his face redder than ever, sweating and tense.

I stepped out in his path.

"Tremain!" he said.

He tried to dodge me, but LoCoco boxed him against the brick wall. I didn't want to show the .45. I said: "You offered to help. Does that still go?"

Varnes looked at LoCoco, then back to me. He swallowed and said: "Why,

We walked down the shady street and got into LoCoco's Chevvie. "There's a drug store up Military," I said. "Stop there first." LoCoco let the cab rocket.

I said to Varnes: "What did you want with Albright?" He shrugged. "Albright's a member

of the gun club. He wanted me to pick up a skeet gun and fix it. A Parker."
"Where is it?"

"The butler couldn't find it."

The lie made me feel good. The shakes almost stopped. I left Varnes in the cab with LoCoco glowering at him and went into the drug store and called Al Rogers.

"Al, you said if there was anything you could do . . . Well, now's the time. Get Mr. Mannix and a few other men and go down on that bridge on the golf course. Don't explain anything to anybody. You'll find a log near the storm shelter. Lug it out on the bridge."

"What's all this?" Al demanded.

"Be there at four o'clock. I'll be up on the road. When I give you the highsign, heave the log into the swamp. That's all."

It was three-thirty-two when I went back to the cab. We headed back around the lake, riding in silence. Sal LoCoco's moonlight issue .45 lay heavy against my chest. We rode all the way to Ninety-third Street without anybody in the cab saying a word.

Passing the chuck wagon, I saw that it was eight minutes after four. Even before we hit the Flats we noticed the little traffic jam on Harm's Way, a half dozen cars parked on the shoulder and people standing on the causeway, looking down onto the golf course. While we watched through the windshield, a bus coming in from Prothero stopped near the cars and the driver climbed out.

"What's going on?" Varnes said.

LoCoco halted at the spot where Marcy had fallen, and the three of us walked across the road. The red-winged blackbirds were fluttering again, and the faint miasma of the swamp lifted to Harm's Way. Eight or ten men were standing on the bridge, among them Al Rogers and Mr. Mannix, some golfers and caddies and Mr. Stanhope of the golf club. Al had the log braced on the bridge railing.

I caught his eye and lifted a thumb. He strained at the log and it toppled off the railing and hit flat with a splash of mud and green slime. Everybody leaned over the railing and watched the log. In a moment it had sunk out of sight.

Sal LoCoco tripped Varnes as he darted for the Chevvie. One of the watching men on the shoulder ran across the concrete and helped us sit on him. The man was Kilarkin of the Times.

"Is this our boy?" Kilarkin said, helping us yank Varnes to his feet.

Varnes said: "What are those guys doing down there?"

"Digging for Willard Fee," I said.

We crammed him into the cab, and LoCoco drove us down the bumpy road to the gun club. Behind us, from the direction of Ninety-third, we could hear a siren whining. We took Varnes down to the rowboat that he had been calking the day before. He looked at us from under his bleached pink evebrows. listening to the siren.

"You've met Gilogly," I said. "You want him to give you his rooster-look?"

Varnes whimpered: "I didn't do it." He wiped his brick-red face on his sleeve. "Albright was out here shooting Monday night. He cleaned his rifle but he didn't put it back in his locker. He put it in his golf bag. I saw him do it, but he didn't see me."

Kilarkin interrupted: "Henry Albright, Fee's partner?"

Varnes nodded. "I was walking to work vesterday morning behind that girl in the pink hat. I saw Mr. Fee crossing the bridge. Albright was standing in the storm shelter behind him. He took the rifle out of his bag and shot at Mr. Fee. The first shot missed. It hit the girl. She had her head turned and she fell without a sound. Albright didn't even know we were up on the road. He fired again and Mr. Fee tumbled off the bridge into the swamp. He just disappeared."

HE shakes got me so hard that I took LoCoco's .45 out of my shirt and handed it back to him before I did something drastic with it. "I knew I was psychiatric," LoCoco said.

Varnes muttered: "Albright threw the rifle in the swamp. It hit near a stump. Then he took his bag and hustled across the bridge. I jumped off the road and hid in some weeds. I don't know why I did it."

"You know exactly why you did it," I said.

He looked at me sullenly.

"That's Gilogly's siren," I said. "Maybe you'd rather explain the blackmail to him."

Varnes wet his lips. "I laid in the weeds until the ambulance went away. Then I fished around the stump and found the rifle. I cleaned it up and called Albright."

"How much did you ask for?" Kilarkin said.

"Nothing, right away. I just told him I had his rifle and I knew where Mr. Fee was. He told me to keep away from him, he'd see me in a week."

Sal LoCoco said: "You saw him last night, Mac."

Varnes nodded at me. "This milkman started poking around. The cops seemed to quit easy, but his guy had a reason to keep on snooping. I went to Albright last night. He said that if Tremain got hot I should fix it somehow. This morning Tremain told me in the chuck wagon that he was pinning it down to the golf club. So I phoned Albright and we worked out a deal."

"The kid," I said. "Artie Bliss."

"I gave the rifle to Artie," Varnes said. "I had his ma tell him what to do. Albright and I knew that ballistics would prove it was the rifle. So that would be the end of it. They wouldn't do much to the kid. The heat would be off Albright. And I'd be set too."

off Albright. And I'd be set too."
"But Marcy wouldn't be set," I said.

I slapped Varnes' brick-red face so he'd have to look at me. Then I swung from as far down as I could reach. I packed all my fear and frustration and bitterness into it. It knocked him galley-west over the rowboat. LoCoco cheered.

"Hold him for Gilogly, Sal," I said.
"I'm borrowing your hack."

LoCoco took the moonlight issue 45 out of his shirt and watched Varnes pick himself up in the dust. Kilarkin jumped into the cab with me and we headed for the causeway.

Gilogly's squad car, siren muted, bumped down the club's drive and blocked our way. Gilogly leaped out and scrambled into the rear seat of the cab. At his signal, the two cops in the squad car pulled away, toward the gun club and Will Yames. The traffic jam in Harm's Way was growing. Men were standing on the shoulder and peering down into the swamp. I bumped and honked through the crowd and sent the cab roaring toward Ninety-third.

Albright would be getting ready to leave his office, natty in his suit of bigshot blue, half limping on his elevator shoes. Pink cheeked and calm outside, scared as a murderer inside . . .

Beside me Kilarkin leaned backward over the seat, talking loud and excitedly above the engine's thrum.

The cab screamed past the chuck wagon, south in Harm's Way. "Albright will keep, boy," Gilogly said. "Don't kill us off in this traffic . . . Did you figure out what he had against Willard Fee?"

I veered across Clybourn and saw headquarters and Emergency ahead. "Who cares?" I said. "Maybe they had business quarrels. Maybe Fee whistled out. All I want from Albright is fifteen hundred dollars. For Marcy and for Mostel and for me."

Kilarkin swung around in the seat. "Say! You hung up while I was trying to tell you. I called up Doc Mostel and explained about you. He's flying his own plane up here. Be here this evening."

"But I haven't got the fifteen hundred vet!"

"He doesn't give a damn about the fifteen hundred. Your wife needs an operation and you want him to do it. That's it, period... And listen, Mostel had a confab on the phone with the surgeons who know about Marcy's case. He thinks it's going to be O.K."

I wheeled the cab into the circular drive behind Emergency and jumped out. "Hey!" Kilarkin said. "How about Albright?"

"Let the cops take care of Albright," I said.



ATCH out for the guy who allows his face to smile but whose eyes neglect to join the effort. . . . Watch out for the gambler with the infectious grin. . . In other words, watch out for Louis Bagnell!

And beware of hearty heavy-jowls, jovial and fat and damp of palm, with a fishy squeeze for a handshake. . . That's Byron Wade, who didn't have to be suave and sleck and smooth as silk to hide the devious deadliness of his brain. His porcine grossness was just as adequate a cover-up for crooked trickery. . . Watch out for him, too! . . And their bodyguards, Vance Caramond (Don't offer Vance a drink! He's stupid and trigger-happy enough sober!) and little Danny, Wade's coked-to-the-eyebrows muscleman. (He was just as bad news with his Colt Woodsman as was Caramond with his Smith & Wesson .32.) . . . Watch out for all four of them next issue in—

### NO POCKETS IN A SHROUD By Richard Deming

—when Manville Moon—"Mr. Moon" to you—takes all four on as paying clients. Of course neither Wade nor Bagnell, Danny nor Caramond, knew just what they were getting into when they hired Moon to protect them from one another. And it's certain Moon was in a quandary. After all, he wasn't used to hiring out to rival gambling cars to keep them from each other's throats—and profits—and maintain peace in the underworld. But everything and anything's in a night's work to a peep with a runaround rep, so what could he lose taking all of 'em on—except license, liberty, life and the pursuit of the uneasy redhead?

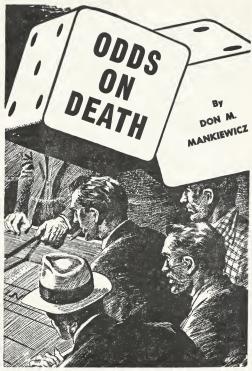


Plus Extra Alibi by D. L. CHAMPION, in which you'll meet Beamish, as unusual a specimen of the genus private eye as you're apit to encounter in a month of murders. "A genius, that's what I am, and tomorrow I'm going to raise my fees," says Beamish modestly. (We'll let you decide whether or not he's sticking his neck out after you've read this smashing new novelette).... Another complete midnight murder mystery—Legitimately Dead—by G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS... And gripping short detective stories by ROBINSON MacLEAN, ROBERT J. Mo-CAIG and others.

This great JANUARY issue of Black Mask will be out on November 19.



OW that you mention it, chum, it is kind of an odd decoration at that. Not the kind of thing you'd expect to find hanging on the wall back of a bar, particularly in a highclass place like this. Looks like a kid's cane to you, huh? I guess you've led a sheltered life, son. That's a dice stick. Every house-run crap game in the world has a stickman, and just about every stickman uses a curved stick like that to return the dice to the shooter between rolls. Most of them are a little tricky, too, like that one there. They don't al-



Nothing was left to chance on Rocco's gambling tables. But with the right odds, even a patsy can buck loaded dice and roll a natural.

ways return the same dice they pick up
—if you get what I mean.

That stick was given to me by my old man. He'd carried it all over the world with him, like a good mechanic might carry a set of fine end-wrenches or a special pair of calipers that he liked. My dad was a pro, same as I was. He'd handled the sticks at dice tables in Caliente, Reno, Saratoga, Florida, Hot Springs, and even at some of the famous European gambling houses along the Riviera. He had a reputation for honesty that would get him a job with any gambling joint in the world. That may sound a little odd to you. Mac, but a guy who wants to work at a dice table had better be honest, even if his job is switching the dice back and forth so the house doesn't get hit. What I mean by that is, the boss has to know that his employees are all working for him; it'd be awfully easy for a stickman to get tied up with somebody from the outside and make a mistake on purpose with those dice some time. Once, that is, Never twice.

DON'T know why I should be telling you the story of my life like this, mister, but you asked about the stick, and I guess you'll stop me if I'm boring you. Well, when Dad got along in years to the point where it hurt him to stand up all night, he wasn't like most stickmen. He'd saved his money. And he quit. You know, like those fellows you read about in the insurance ads in the magazines, that go off to some cabin in the mountains and spend all their time fishing. Well, that's what my old man did; just quit and bought a shack out near Pike's Peak and there. except for a Christmas card every year, I haven't heard from him since. At the time he quit, we were both working as stickmen at Rocco's, up the street. You ever been there? Well, don't bother. If you ever feel like going there for an evening's pleasure, as the fellow says, just mail Rocco your money. That way'you won't be pushed around and have to smell all the cigar smoke. And you got just as good a chance to win.

What I mean by that is, Rocco's joint is just as crooked as he is, which is the same as to say nothing is left to chance. I have an idea that was one of the things that got my old man to quit. Rocco's being such a crooked house, and him being too old to go traipsing around the country looking for a better job. When he quit, Dad gave me that stick and before he left for the mountains he gave me a quick course in how to operate it. There wasn't anything I couldn't do with that stick. The way it worked is this: a fellow would come in and start. shooting. At the start of his roll he got a whole basket of Rocco's dice, everyone of them honest, to pick from. Any two dice in the basket that he liked. those were the dice he used. Well, as long as he kept shooting for reasonable stakes, he'd keep those dice. Every time he'd shoot, I'd slide the dice back to him with the stick, and he'd roll them out again. The house would be taking its percentage out of the side bets, the guy would win-a-little-lose-a-little. everybody would be happy, particularly Rocco and me.

That's the way things usually go at any crap table. The bets fairly even, no arguments, honest dice, pass, miss, pass, and the percentage gradually dragging all the money out of everybody's pockets.

But there are emergencies that do come up every now and then. Some guy will get hot and start letting his bets ride—which means he doubles his money with every pass he makes. When somebody starts doing that, that's when Rocco gets glad I've got my stick and know how to use it. You see, if a guy does let his money ride, and if he only gets fairly hot, let's say he makes eleven passes. Now, on that twelfth roll he's shooting two thousand and some dollars for every dollar he started with. What we do when this happens is pretty simple, and, while it's not foolproof, it very rarely goes wrong.

We give the guy his perfectly honest dice that he's been shooting with all along for his first throw. If he comes out right there on one roll-if he sevens or elevens, that is-he's a winner and we've got to hope he tries it again. He may crap out on that one roll, too, that is, he may hit two, three, or twelve, and lose right there but most likely he'll catch a point, that is, he'll roll four, five, six, eight, nine, or ten. And then he's got to make his point, roll it again before he rolls a seven, and the percentages say he's not likely to do it. That's why even an honest crap table (if there is such a thing), would make money. But percentage doesn't say he can't make or he won't do it, just that he's not likely to do it. That stick up on the wall there. Mac, that's what says he can't do it. To put it as simply as I can, that stick has a little slot in it, a kind of panel, and when I grab my end of the stick a little tighter than usual, that panel gets all loose and wobbly. When I push the dice with the stick they just wander in back of the panel and some other dice come flying out about a quarter inch further up the stick. Sure it's tough to make a stick like that, but it's tough to make a car, or a watch, or a hat that rabbits can hide in. It's hard to operate a stick like that and not get caught at it, too, and that's why Rocco was paying me a hundred and a quarter a week to push the dice back and forth on his table-and this was some years ago when a hundred and a quarter was pretty good money. I won't bore you with a lot of details about those other dice, chum. They were made in Minneapolis, and to put it

very, very, simply, they couldn't come up anything but seven.

You get the picture now, don't you, friend? I mean here's this sucker, all set to try to make his eight or nine or whatever for a couple of thousand bucks, and here he is shaking these dice that can't come up anything but seven. Of course, real smart gamblers used to notice that nobody ever seemed to make a good score on the crap table, and most of the big money boys stayed off it. But that didn't bother Rocco; there were plenty of guys in town that figured they could beat that table, and they used to contribute enough to pay my wages and leave the house with a handsome profit.

Every time a guy would miss out on his big roll, whether he did it because his luck was lousy or with some help from my old man's stick, Rocco would look at him real sad and say: "Looks like you lose your dough, son. Two rolls, no coffee." "Two rolls, no coffee." always struck me as a pretty terrible pun, but guys who are winning in crap games all over the world think it's about the wittest remark ever made.

The guy Rocco said "Two rolls, no coftee" to oftenest was a fellow named Perino. "Patsy" Perino they used to call him. Rocco made that nickname up because he said Perino was the biggest Patsy that ever was, and the tag sort of stuck. As far as I know, nobody ever called Patsy by his right name; in fact, nobody seemed to know what his square name might be. But everybody used to just call him Patsy and it made him furious.

ATSY was convinced of two things in this world. First of all, he was convinced that he was the unluckiest gambler that ever drew breath, and I must say I can see where he got that idea because he bucked Rocco's crap table every payday from 1933 to 1940 and I don't think he went away winner more than once. That once was close to Christmas, and I knew Patsy hadn't saved anything out of his pay up at the mill-which was about twenty bucks a week-and I figured he'd have to buy his girl a present, so I sort of lct him win a hundred and forty bucks figuring we'd get it back after the holidays. Rocco gave me hell for it and told me if it ever happened again it would come out of my pay, and, believe me, mister, it never happened again. The other thing Patsy believed was that some day his luck would turn and that when that happened he'd beat that crap table out of every cent he'd poured into it, and more too.

Well, like I said, Patsy dropped every cent he could get his hands on into that crap game from 1933 to 1940, and when he stopped coming around, Rocco was worried about him. Not that Rocco gave a damn about Patsy, really. He just thought of Patsy as a kind of agent who had to work all week at a heavy machine and then bring his money to Rocco, and he was sore when Patsy didn't show up, same as a father might be if sonny boy failed to pony up the weekly check.

The upshot of it all was that he sent me up to Patsy's end of town to look around for him. It was along about November, 1940, that I went wandering up to the bunch of little houses back of the mill where I figured Patsy must live. It's funny, but I'd never been up that way before; working late nights, I'd always had a room near Rocco's place, and when I wasn't working or sleeping I'd usually drop down here for a drink. Well, the first person I ran into was Patsy's girl. Real pretty she was, too, which is kind of surprising when you figure Patsy wasn't much of a catch, being just another guy who worked in the mill, and not even one of the steady ones who'd bring home a full envelope every Friday, but a born gambler who'd never have a nickel. But everybody's always known that Louise was Patsy's girl and that was that. I guess she started going with him in high school, before he'd really begun gambling, and when the dice bug bit him she figured she ought to stick with him, same as if he was sick or something, which, in a manner of speaking, he was.

Well, I gave Louise a big smile and an extra cheerful hello, and she just sort of froze up and went on up the street without a word. I followed her, and finally she went into a grocery store, and so did I. Once I'd told her that we were just curious about why Patsy hadn't been around to Rocco's in so long, that he didn't owe us any money or anything, she unfroze a little, and told me that Patsy was in the Army and that he wouldn't be back for a year; not, she was quick to add, that it was any of my business. Well, having nothing better to do, I walked her home, and when we got there, she asked me in, just out of politeness, I guess. Louise is about the politest girl there is. We talked of this and that, mostly about Patsy, and I could see that she didn't hold Patsy's failings against me, which was only right after all. She told me about how Patsy had quit the dice time and time again, and how they were always figuring on getting married as soon as he'd saved up enough money, but how he'd always break down as soon as he got his hands on his pay chit and go down to Rocco's and blow it in. Of course, like I said, it wasn't any of my fault, the whole thing, but listening to her tell it. I was almost ashamed of myself. I got Patsy's address from her, which was Camp Carson, Colorado, and wished her luck, and went back to Rocco's.

Well, Patsy turned out to be only the first of a lot of guys to go into the Army from our town, and eventually it got so the place was mainly populated by overage bankers, school-kids, and women. The guys who weren't drafted, it seems they all took off for the other towns chasing after the war-plants and the big money. Maybe for a lot of guys the war was a time for big money, but not for Rocco and me. We kept the house going as long as we could, even put in slot machines and let the women in, but it was no use. We started booking horses, and the horses stopped running. So what we wound up doing was the best we could, like the fellow says, and take my word for it, mister, it was no good. We like to starve to death before the war was over.

Well, when it finally did end, the boys started coming back, and the dice started to roll again. Not just small time stuff like before, real big time, big money, games. The boys were all loaded from the shippards and the airplane factories, and wages were way up at the mill, and what with one thing and another we raised the minimum bet at the crap table from half a buck to half a pound. and Rocco raised me from a hundred and a quarter to two-and-a-half. Things were really great; only one more thing we needed: Patsy, He didn't show up with the rest of the boys, and I was beginning to think that maybe he was as unhandy a soldier as he was a diceshooter, and in that case he sure never would be back.

HEN one night, after closing time at Rocco's, I was sitting right in here having a drink, not behind the bar like now, but over there at one of those little tables, when who should come strolling through the front door? That's right, chum, Patsy himself.

"Hiya, Patsy!" I said. I was really glad to see him—not just because of business, you know. He was like an old friend, even if I never knew him except as another guy to slide the dice to. He looked at me kind of funny. "Name's John, Tony," he said. "Not Patsy. I learned a lot in the Army, Tony."

He came over and sat down and started to talk. He told me how he'd been overseas, in Italy with the ski troops, and how he'd seen a lot of killing and done a little himself. But he'd been careful. Real careful. "You know why I was so careful. Tony?" he asked me. I just looked at him. "I was careful. Tony, because I wanted to get back to this town. I wanted to go up to Rocco's and get hunk with that damn dice game of his. When you see him, Tonv. vou tell him I'm in town and I've got money and I'm coming up tomorrow night-" he glanced at his watch-"make that tonight, and give his dice game a real going-over."

Well, when he said that, I knew he hadn't learned as much in the Army as he thought. A man going duck hunting doesn't tell the ducks. It gives them a chance to get set.

Rocco and I got set, O.K. We checked over our board and our dice, and we went over to the bank and got a great big stack of crisp, fresh-looking hundreds because in a big game it helps if the house has a lot of cash money to flash around.

When we opened for business that night, I could tell something was up. All the boys from the mill were there, and we figured Patsy had been telling them his big plans. Some of the lads came over to the dice table and started shooting, five bucks at a time, but you could tell they were just killing time. Rocco was walking around between the roulette wheel and the craps setup with an expression on his face like a cat that figures to eat a canary.

About ten o'clock Patsy walked in, and the whole crowd, as if it was a

signal, moved over to the dice table. They were standing about four deep around it. The boy who was shooting made his point and picked his saw off the pass line. Then, instead of putting down some more money and shooting again, he set the dice down on the edge of the table. In any language in the world that means the shooter passes the dice.

"Whose dice?" I said.

Patsy shoved his way through the crowd just to the right of the boy who'd passed the dice and said: "I'll take 'em, Tony. O.K.?"

"Well, Patsy-" I began.

"John." He still didn't sound mad. Just firm.

"John," I said. "You're supposed to let the dice come around to you once, but unless there's some objection, they're yours."

Nobody objected. Patsy picked up the dice. Rocco came over and stood beside me to watch. There was an awful dead silence while Patsy rolled out. Every once in a while I'd say, "Pay the line" or "Pay the field", but there weren't any other bettors. Just Patsy. He was betting twenty bucks at a time, and Rocco and I just stood there and watched him make five points in a row, which put him a hundred ahead and was a little unusual, but nothing shocking. He was shooting with perfectly honest dice, of course; any time a man shoots only twenty bobs in Rocco's he'll get honest dice, the way I told you. I was starting to relax a little when it happened.

Patsy slapped down another twenty bucks and rolled two fours. Then, while the dice—perfectly honest dice, you understand—were still lying there on the table, down at my end way out of his reach, he turned to Rocco.

"Lay the odds, Rocco?" he asked, very quietly, like you might ask someone the time of day. This meant he wanted to

bet some more that he'd make his eight before he rolled a seven, and that he wanted Rocco to give him the odds, which are to six to five he won't.

"For how much." Rocco sounded disinterested, and his voice let everybody know he'd handle any bet a punk like Patsy could make.

"A thousand," said Patsy.

"Laying twelve hundred to a thou," said Rocco, looking down at my stick.

I tightened my fist around the head of my stick and spun the dice back to Patsy. He didn't look at them, just picked them up in his right hand and shook them back and forth in his fist. holding them way over his head. He slipped his left hand into his pants pocket, hauled out his wallet, and tossed it on the table. "Tony," he said, "get a thousand out of there and put it on the pass line." I reached over, picked up the wallet, and glanced inside. There was a lot more than a thousand in there, at least a hundred C-notes, it looked like. I picked ten of them out and tossed them on the line. Rocco peeled twelve of his bills off the house stack and added them to the pile.

"Like to see what you're shooting for." Rocco said with that oily grin of his. I suddenly decided I didn't care much for Rocco. For a second, I wished I could get another chance at stickhandling those dice so I could give Patsy the honest ones back again.

PATSY started shaking the dice again, and then brought his hand towards the table. Everybody craned to get a better look. Then, before he turned the dice loose, he stopped again, and put his hand, dice and all, back over his head, like a football player about to toss a pass. He looked over at Rocco like he'd just had an idea.

"Hey, Rocco," he said, very casual, "how much money in that stack?" "Come on, come on, fire your pistol!"
Rocco came back, getting a little impatient. "You going to take all night for your lousy grand? There's enough down there to cover any bet you want to make, Patsy." He said "Patsy" like it was an insult, not like a nickname.

"Good," said Patsy. Then he looked at me, "Tony," he said, "would you please take ten thousand out of that wallet and put it on the 'Come.'"

Like the fellow says, my life started to flash through my head a little bit at a time and I started to get dizzy. What Patsy was doing was, well, he was betting he'd come. "Come" in a crap game means to make your point starting when you make your bet. I guess you've never shot craps, Mac, so I won't try and explain it to you; the important things is, if you roll a seven, you've come, and you win. And Patsy was betting ten grand he'd win. And I'd just sticked him two dice that couldn't come up any way but seven!

I just stood there, and the guys from the mills started to mutter and chatter among themselves. "What's holding you back? You going to take all night for a lousy ten grand?" One of the mill guys gave a sort of nervous laugh, I looked at Rocco. He was just standing there with his mouth part ways open, like he was seeing what was happening but he didn't quite believe it.

Well, what could I do? I tossed Patay's ten grand over on the little kidney-shaped part of the layout marked "Come". I closed my eyes while he threw the dice, and when I opened them up again, all the mill guys were cheering, and Patsy was helping himself to ten grand out of Rocco's dough. When he had it all counted up and put away in his poke he turned to me and said: "I guess I lose my twenty, Tony. Two rolls, no coffee. Too bad."

Then he turned away and walked out

of Rocco's place and you could tell he wasn't coming back. The twenty, of course, was still on the table, and, like I was dreaming, I picked it up and put it in what was left of Rocco's stack.

That wound up the crap shooting for that night, and I walked down here from Rocco's not seeing much where I was going or who I bumped into. It was all a kind of bad dream, like I said.

Well, I'd got a week's salary out of Rocco just the day before all this happened, and I had a kind of hunch it was going to be the last I'd ever get from him, so I sat down in here and drank most of it up. There was something in what Patsy'd done that didn't add up, something that was familiar, vaguely familiar to me, like I'd been through it all before.

About halfway through my ninth bourbon, or maybe my tenth, it came to me. A story my old man used to tell me. about a sucker who'd cleaned out a crap game he knew was crooked, just the same way Patsy did. It had happened to my old man years ago, in San Remo, Italy. I put down what was left of my drink and started some heavy thinking, or as heavy as you can think on eightand-a-half, or maybe nine-and-a-half, bourbons. Then I remembered that Camp Carson, where the ski troops trained, is not really so very far from Pike's Peak. A guy like Patsy, on a pass, might easily have gone into some gambling joint in, say Colorado Springs, and mavbe . . .

Say, I hope I haven't been boring you, chum, but you know, bartenders are supposed to be a little gabby, and I've been a bartender ever since that night.

What's that, bub? What did Patsy do with his ten grand? Well, I don't know if I should tell you that. Your cigar's gone out, though. Here, have a light. Keep 'em. They're on the house. Courtesy of Patsy's Bar and Grill.



### **CRY SILENCE**

By FREDRIC BROWN

T WAS that old silly argument heard it argued by college professors about sound. If a tree falls deep in the forest where there is no ear to hear, is its fall silent? Is there sound where there is no ear to hear it? I've

and by street sweepers.

This time it was being argued by the agent at the little railroad station and a beefy man in coveralls. It was a warm

Would you try to save your wife from a killer? Seems like a simple question, but to Mandy's husband, it was one to stump the experts.

summer evening at dusk, and the station agent's window opening onto the back platform of the station was open; his elbows rested on the ledge of it. The beefy man leaned against the red brick of the building. The argument between them went in circles like a droning bumble bee.

I sat on a wooden bench on the platform about ten feet away. I was a stranger in town, waiting for a train that was late. There was one other man present; he sat on the bench beside me, between me and the window. He was a tall, heavy man with a face like granite, an uncompromising kind of face, and huge, rough hands. He looked like a farmer in his town clothes.

I wasn't interested in either the argument or the man beside me. I was wondering only how late that damned train would be.

I didn't have my watch; it was being repaired in the city. And from where I sat I couldn't see the clock inside the station. The tall man beside me was wearing a wrist watch and I asked him what time it was.

He didn't answer

You've got the picture, haven't you? Four of us; three on the platform and the agent, leaning out of the window. The argument between the agent and the beefy man. On the bench, the silent man and I.

I got up off the bench and looked into the open door of the station. It was seven-forty; the train was twelve minutes overdue. I sighed, and lighted a cigarette. I decided to stick my nose into the argument. It wasn't any of my business, but I knew the answer and they didn't.

"Pardon me for butting in," I said, "but you're not arguing about sound at all; you're arguing semantics."

I expected one of them to ask me what semantics was, but the station agent fooled me. He said: "That's the

study of words, isn't it? In a way, you're right, I guess."

"All the way," I insisted. "If you look up 'sound' in the dictionary, you'll find two meanings listed. One of them is 'the vibration of a medium, usually air, within a certain range,' and the other is 'the effect of such vibrations on the ear.' That isn't the exact wording, but the general idea. Now by one of those definitions, the sound—the vibration—exists whether there's an ear around to hear it or not. By the other, the vibrations aren't sound unless there is an ear to hear them. So you're both right, it's just a matter of which meaning you use for the word 'sound'."

The beefy man said: "Maybe you got something there." He looked back at the agent, "Let's call it a draw then, Joe. I got to get home. So long."

He stepped down off the platform and went around the station.

I asked the agent: "Any report on the train?"

"Nope," he said. He leaned a little farther out the window and looked to his right and I saw a clock in a steeple about a block away that I hadn't noticed before. "Ought to be along soon though." He grinned at me. "Expert on sound,

huh?"
"Well," I said, "I wouldn't say that.
But I did happen to look it up in the
dictionary. I know what it means."

"Uh-huh. Well, let's take that second definition and say sound is sound only if there's an ear to hear it. A tree crashes in the forest and there's only a deaf man there. Is there any sound?"

"I guess not," I said. "Not if you consider sound as subjective. Not if it's got to be heard."

HAPPENED to glance to my right, at the tall man who hadn't answered my question about the time, He was still staring straight ahead.

Lowering my voice a bit, I asked the station agent: "Is he deaf?"

"Him? Bill Meyers?" He chuckled; there was something odd in the sound of that chuckle. "Mister, nobody knows. That's what I was going to ask you next. If that tree falls down and there's a man near, but nobody knows if he's deaf or not, is there any sound?"

His voice had gone up in volume. I stared at him, puzzled, wondcring if he was a little crazy, or if he was just trying to keep up the argument by thinking up screwy loopholes.

I said: "Then if nobody knows if he's deaf, nobody knows if there was any sound."

He said: "You're wrong, mister. That man would know whether he heard it or not. Maybe the tree would know, wouldn't it? And maybe other people would know, too."

"I don't get your point," I told him.
"What are you trying to prove?"
"Murder mister You just got up

"Murder, mister. You just got up from sitting next to a murderer."

I stared at him again, but he didn't look crazy. Far off, a train whistled, faintly. I said: "I don't understand you."

"The guy sitting on the bench," he said. "Bill Meyers. He murdered his wife. Her and his hired man."

His voice was quite loud. I felt uncomfortable; I wished that far train was a lot nearer. I didn't know what went on here, but I knew I'd rather be on the train. Out of the corner of my eye I looked at the tall man with the granite face and the big hands. He was still staring out across the tracks. Not a muscle in his face had moved.

The station agent said: "I'll tell you about it, mister. I like to tell people about it. His wife was a cousin of mine, a fine woman. Mandy Eppert, her name was, before she married that skunk. He was mean to her, dirt mean. Know how

mean a man can be to a woman who's helpless?

"She was seventeen when she was fool enough to marry him seven years ago. She was twenty-four when she died last spring. She'd done more work than most women do in a lifetime, out on that farm of his. He worked her like a horse and treated her like a slave. And her religion wouldn't let her divorce him or even leave him. See what I mean, mister?"

I cleared my throat, but there didn't seem to be anything to say. He didn't need prodding or comment. He went on.

"So how can you blame her, mister, for loving a decent guy, a clean, young fellow her own age, when he fell in love with her? Just loving him, that's all. I'd bet my life on that, because I knew Mandy. Oh, they talked, and they looked at each other—I wouldn't gamble too much there wasn't a stolen kiss now and then. But nothing to kill them for, mister."

I felt uneasy; I wished the train would come and get me out of this. I had to say something, though; the agent was waiting. I said: "Even if there had been the unwritten law is out of date."

"Right, mister." I'd said the right thing. "But you know what that bastard sitting over there did? He went deaf."

"Huh?" I said.

"He went deaf. He came in town to see the doc and said he'd been having earaches and couldn't hear any more. Was afraid he was going deaf. Doc gave him some stuff to try, and you know where he went from the doc's office?"

I didn't try to guess.

"Sheriff's office," he said. "Told the sheriff he wanted to report his wife and his hired man were missing, see? Smart of him. Wasn't it? Swore out a complaint and said he'd prosecute if they were found. But he had an awful lot of trouble getting any of the questions the sheriff asked. Sheriff got tired of yelling and wrote 'em down on paper. Smart. See what I mean?"

"Not exactly," I said. "Hadn't his

wife run away?"

"He'd murdered her. And him. Or rather, he was murdering them. Must have taken a couple of weeks, about. Found 'em a month later."

He glowered, his face black with anger.

"In the smokehouse," he said. "A new smokehouse made out of concrete and not used yet. With a padlock on the outside of the door He'd walked through the farmyard one day about a month before—he said after their bodies were found—and noticed the padlock wasn't locked, just hanging in the hook and not even through the hasp.

"See? Just to keep the padlock from being lost or swiped, he slips it through the hasp and snaps it."

"My God," I said. "And they were in there? They starved to death?"

"Thirst kills you quicker, if you haven't either water or food. Oh, they'd tried hard to get out, all right. Scraped halfway through the door with a piece of concrete he'd worked loose. It was a thick door. I figure they yelled, after a while. I figure they hammered on that door plenty. Was there sound, mister, with only a deaf man living near that door, passing it twenty times a day.

GAIN he chuckled humorlessly.
He said: "Your train'll be along
soon. That was it you heard
white. It stops up by the water tower.
It'll be here in ten minutes." And without changing his tone of voice, except
that his tone got louder again, he said:
"It was a bad way to die. Even if he
was right in killing them, only a blackhearted son of a gun would have done it
that way. Don't you think so?"

I said: "But are you sure he is-"

"Deaf? Sure, he's deaf. Can't you picture him standing there in front of that padlocked door, listening with his deaf ears to the hammering inside? And the yelling?

"Sure, he's deaf. That's why I can say all this to him, yell it in his ear. If I'm wrong, he can't hear me. But he can hear me. He comes here to hear me."

an hear me. He comes here to hear me."

I had to ask it. "Why? Why would

he-if you're right."

"I'm helping him, that's why. I'm helping him to make up his black mind to hang a rope from the grating in the top of that smokehouse, and dangle from it. He hasn't got the guts to, yet. So every time he's in town, he sits on the platform a while to rest. And I tell him what a murdering son of a gun he is."

He spat toward the tracks. He said: "There are a few of us know the score. Not the sheriff; he wouldn't believe us, said it would be too hard to prove."

The scrape of feet behind me made me turn. The tall man with the huge hands and the granite face was standing up now. He didn't look toward us. He started for the starte

now. He didn't look toward us. He started for the steps.

The agent said: "He'll hang himself, pretty soon now. He wouldn't come here and sit like that for any other reason,

would he, mister?"
"Unless," I said, "he is deaf."

"Sure. He could be. See what I meant? If a tree falls and the only man there to hear it is maybe deaf and maybe not, is it silent or isn't it? Well, I got to get the mail pouch ready."

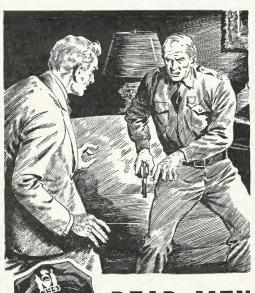
I turned and looked at the tall figure walking away from the station. He walked slowly and his shoulders, big as they were, seemed a little stooped.

The clock in the steeple a block away began to strike for eight o'clock.

The tall man lifted his wrist to look at the watch on it.

I shuddered a little. It could have been coincidence, sure, and yet a little chill went down my spine.

The train pulled in, and I got aboard.



### DEAD MEN

Jimmy Rock had always been a smart shamus—till he investigated the death of the senator's wife and damn near got a hole through that clever head of his.



The .22 spat again, spun Sam around and he swung up with a gun in his right hand.

### **CAN'T WELSH**

By MEL COLTON

HE opened the door. She was dressed very neatly in a blue tailored suit. She was full-bosomed, but not heavy, seemed sure of herself, and a little less than thirty.

She hesitated, then asked: "Yes?"

"Miss Holmes?"

She frowned, then quickly picked up a smile. "Wrong room, sorry." But she didn't slam the door in my face. She seemed to sense there was more to it.

I said: "Room 24-C. Miss Jackson's?"

She said: "That's better-"

"Then you must be Miss Holmes?"

Her smile went away. She studied my face, each feature carefully, and then said: "Won't you come in?"

It was the average hotel room. There was a bed, a dresser, a chair by a window, a writing desk and a picture of roses framed above the bed. Steam from the laundry below was fogging the window outside.

When we were seated, facing each other—I was in the chair, she was on the corner of the bed—she said: "Now, what is this foolishness about a Miss Holmes?"

I said, quietly: "Who you kidding, sister?"

She crossed her legs, carefully, gracefully, and very lady-like, but not without giving me the impression that the movement was a practiced one; and that I should get the idea here was a desirable woman with class and nice legs under her skirt—and that I was a man.

I got the idea.

"My name is Helen Jackson," she insisted, as she watched with eyes that were hazel one second, a grayish-green the next, passing the light quickly like the eyes of a cat. "Who is this Miss Holmes?"

"This Dorothy Holmes," I explained, "doesn't know the first thing about getting lost in a big city. She lived at the Commodore Hotel on Sunset Boulevard, decided to get lost, so packed up and skidooed. But she made a mistake. She hired a taxi from the Commodore's stand. Cabbies have wonderful memories for such trips-especially girls with suitcases in a hurry, and shifting from one hotel to another at the other end of town. It's sort of a sideline for them. Sooner or later someone is going to come up and ask them: 'Buddy, happen to see a dame in a hurry, looks like this, dresses like that, appears to be either frightened, mad or sick?' For a five spot they develop photographic memories.

"Now," I grinned, "we have the time of arrival, the hotel, and a few extra dollars here and there—"

"And Miss Holmes becomes Miss Jackson," she interrupted.

I said that was about the size of it.

"You're very clever," she said, her smile coming back. "You must be Jimmy Rock."

I said I was the clever Jimmy Rock.

HE leaned back on her elbows and looked up at the cracked ceiling.
I guess that she was my clue to

I guess that she was my clue to admire her. So I did. She possessed a fine, clear-cut face; one of those faces in which you feel passion hiding behind every feature. She was a tall girl, with finely molded shoulders, long delicate hands, and highly polished nails. She had shiny black hair, lacquered, parted severely in the middle, and drawn tightly to the scalp. Her eyebrows curved like new moons over the changeable eyes; a strong mouth with thin lips twisting up at the ends, Satanically mocking at the angelic dimples that dug deeply into her cheeks. Her chin was firm. Her expression was cocky.

I tried again: "What's the idea—this hotel hopping?"

She came back up, leaned slightly, laid a soft hand on mine, and said: "You wouldn't understand—Jimmy."

"Try me."

Her soft, cool hand stayed on mine. "He has a bad habit of welshing."

I ran a tongue between my teeth, said

"And he welshed on you, didn't he?" she added, moving those lips into a small measured smile.

My teeth felt like sandpaper as my tongue made a return trip. I was becoming the big, silent type. She took her nice soft hand back. She re-crossed her legs, this time a little carelessly, but it could have been accidental.

She said: "Suppose you tell me the angle-now that you've found me?"

"I'm a private investigator—"

"You work for Blaine Custer," she snapped. "Blaine hired you to dig me up."

"Not exactly-"

She smiled again, but her voice didn't match it. She said, bitterly: "Quit throwing dirt in my face, Jimmy Rock. I know all about Blaine Custer hiring you to get the goods on his wife—for five thousand dollars!"

"That's right, honey. I'm the guy whose pastime is digging up dirt and burying people in it for a fee. Nice, healthy work. I love it," I said harshly. "Just the kind of a guy that makes it easy for a dame like you to marry a Blaine Custer—when he gets rid of his wifer"

Her eyes sharpened: "You don't have to get nasty about it."

"O.K. Let's get back to first base.
You intend ditching Blaine-?"

"That's right."

"That's great," I said in a low, padded voice. I could almost feel soft-slippered Chinamen, smoking long pipes, tipping off the end of my tongue. "So you run out on him." I waited for some kind of reaction, got none, wet my lips and continued: "Tell me, Miss Holmes, did you ditch him after his wife, Lilly Custer, was pushed out—or before—?"

She stiffened. Her eyes became saucers. She said in a whisper: "Pushed?" Then she took a long, trembling breath. Her eyes went vacant, foggy. Her face paled, small wrinkles of terror clutched at her mouth corners, and she muttered again: "Pushed? No. It .. Was accidental. She fell out—"

Something in her voice, the way she uttered the words, made me feel she wasn't so sure. "I don't suppose you'd like to-" I started.

Dorothy Holmes jumped to her feet practically a spurt—faced me, and laid a hard hand across my face. I felt the blood rush to the spot.

When I got to my feet, she was over by the dresser fumbling in a drawer. By the time my hands were clenched, I was looking at a pearl-handled .22. She pushed it a few inches. "Get out!"

I looked at her. I looked at the gun. It was like a toy pistol, this £2 target, but it did the trick. I went out the door, peacefully.

LAINE CUSTER, seated in my favorite chair, tapped irritatingly on the arm. His florid face was pinched, creases lined his forehead, and his small, white mustache wiggled as his lips quivered. "For god's sakes, Rock," he cried, "why did you ever tell her that? That pushed angle. That's brutal, man—

"I was testing a theory."

"Testing a theory, hell," he secowled.
"I told you to find her, not persecute
the kid. She's a nice kid, Rock. You
shouldn't have—"

"All right. So maybe I made a mistake."

"Maybe you made a mistake!"
"But I found out one thing," I said

bluntly. "She'll have no more of you."

Blaine Custer waved a disdaining hand. The small circular rubies in his cuffs sparkled a bright spot on the ceil-

He said: "Just a misunderstanding. Nothing to it. She'll be back."

"What makes you so sure?"

His laugh was insulting. "You don't know that kind of a girl, Rock. They come back. They have to have their sulk."

"I'm not so sure."

He got to his feet—a heavy-set, broad shouldered man with eyes that hooded and a mouth that had a chronic agitation. He picked up his Malacca cane from the side of the chair, grabbed his bomburg, set it at a rakish angle on his white hair, and said: "Now look here—"

"Why'd she run away?"

"Why? Personal reasons, that's why. Now look here. I hired you to find her, not ask me questions."

"She ran away because she was scared," I pushed in. "She's still scared —only add confusion to it."

"What are you getting at?"

My reply was careless: "She thinks you might have pushed Lilly."

Red mottled his face and flamed against white temples. His cane dropped to the floor. He made a quick sweeping gesture in picking it up, attempting to cover whatever nervousness he betrayed at the moment. His knuckles showed white as he lifted the cane. He stammered: "Nonsense, Whoever—"

I said: "The records show Mrs. Lilly Custer died from an accidental fall from her second story apartment in the Las Palmas Apartment Hotel, landing on the cement auto driveway just below her window. Because of your connections it was accepted as accidental death instead of possible suicide—suicide because of what I found out about her and handed over to you. But it wasn't advisable to have the senator's wife publicized as a suicide. It would hurt your campaign. This way it gives sympathy..."

Custer's lips twitched. His eyes told me nothing.

I continued: "The police accepted accidental death; we accepted it. But Miss Dorothy Holmes, the other woman in the case, doesn't. She thinks maybe someone pushed Lilly—"

Blaine's hand pawed at his mouth. "God! Man-"

"Now why would she think that?"

"Why?" Blaine Custer's jaw sagged.
"I'm asking you, Senator."

Blaine Custer's clenched hand relaxed and his face lost some of its redness. His eyes became quiet.

He said: "Did Dorothy tell you of her suspicions or is this all guess work on your part?"

"Guess work," I admitted.

For the moment there was an icy silence. Blaine stood looking down at me, his face hard, his eyes beginning to take on light. Then he said quietly: "All right. Rock, you win the round."

A mouth muscle twitched in his face. He stated, then continued: "The day Lilly fell out of the French window, we had a terrific squabble. She threatened to start divorce proceedings against me whether I had evidence against her or not. It upset me. Dorothy knew about the argument. She knew Lilly was making demands on me that, at the present, I couldn't meet. Lilly was actually blackmailing me because of the coming election. A divorce action in court would have ruined me."

I said: "How much did she want?"

"Two thousand a week. I—I haven't that kind of money. I've been paying her two fifty—"

"Go on."

"So I had to see Lilly to talk it over, come to some agreement. Well," he shrugged, "Dorothy assumes maybe—"

He lifted his hands, dropped them, then turned and walked to the door. His hands was on the knob, when he said, "I want you to start working for me again. I want you to prove—to Dorothy—that Lilly fell out of that window."

I managed a smile: "Suppose it turns ou that she was pushed?"

His hand on the knob relaxed, then tightened. When he spoke, his jaw was set, his eyes were trained directly at me. His voice was a little louder than it should have been. "Then you prove it wasn't me," he snapped. Then he lifted his cane, used it as a pointer. "And remember, Rock, the case is closed. You're on your own."

I said: "Yeah."

When he left I suddenly remembered he owed me five thousand for the evidence I dug up on Lilly Custer.

HE Chief of Police, Sam Crowder, stood six-two, was two hundred and forty pounds of man, and about fifty. His hair was on the sides, the top was balding, and gray was beginning to show at the temples. His eyes were small with pulfs hanging over them; his nose was short, stubby, and thick lips caressed a black cigar. A large oak desk was cluttered with papers and in front stood an onyx-base statue of a gold baseball player swinging a bat. Below was engraved: Championship: Fireman-Policeman Baseball Contest. Won by Police Department—1947.

He shook my hand once, pump-lever style, then waved me into a hard chair next to his desk. He then wheeled back behind the desk, smiled around the cigar, and asked: "How's the senator?" His smile was friendly, but his eyes were warv, a little mean, perhaps.

I came right out with it: "The senator thinks his wife was pushed out--"

The chief squeezed his eyes into dash marks. He opened them slowly, then slowly rocked back in his swivel chair. He said: "Yeah?"

I said: "Yeah. The senator asked me to see what I could do about the pushed angle." I hesitated, looked at him, added: "Undercover, of course."

Across the chief's face a scowl came and went. A smile followed and became lost as his inquisitive eyes drilled into mine. He snapped: "So the senator thinks his wife was pushed, does he? Now he gets around to thinking of that possibility. All of a sudden-like?" I played it dumb.

His eyes moved over me. He came up in his chair, his cigar wiggling with the movement of his lips. He brought up another smile, but it was loose. He said: "And why does the senator want the case reopened, undercover—of course?"

"Circumstances."

"Something just dug up, eh? By you, maybe?"

"Maybe--"

A thin, mocking smile played around his mouth. He said: "You're looking for trouble. All you shamuses ask for trouble. Not satisfied the way we handled it. Rock?"

"I wouldn't say that."

Sam Crowder leaned over the desk, his chin cutting into the air. "The ordinary private dick is a nuisance. They get in the way, make the road rougher than it is—but after a time, they crawl back into their holes and are satisfied with their fee. But you," he shook his big head, "you give me a pain. You've been in the department. You oughta know better. What's the matter, you trying to get even or something?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "The senator wants . . ."

"Tell the senator to go to hell!" He stormed. "This is a police department, not a political grab-bag." The desk trembled as he slammed his hand down. "The case is closed—finished."

A heavy silence blanketed the room. A typewriter was heard beating its staccator rhythm in another room. Somewhere outside an auto horn and a street car gong were battling it out. Ash dropped from Crowder's cigar and fell silently, covering the papers with a grayish powder.

Crowder filled his lungs with a long slow breath of smoke, then gently exhaled. Through the smoke, he said: "All right. Let's have it. What'd you dig up?" "Nothing as yet, Sam."

A lot of tension was stocked in the chief and it showed mostly in his face. He stared at me, then got up, lumbered over to the window and peered out. He said without looking back: "You got a lot of guts, Rock. You always had a lot of guts, but it's all in your belly, not in your head." He came back, pointed a stubby finger at me. "You're playing around with dynamite. I want no part of it."

"Then you admit the possibility-"

"I admit nothing," he snarled. "Not a damned thing. It was accidental. Everybody says it was accidental. Everybody is satisfied. O.K., so it's politics. Listen, Rock, I'm a police officer, not a district attorney. Go ahead, play with him for a while."

I got up. "O.K., Sam. No coopera-

on-"
"I didn't say that," he fumed.

Sam was a big, heavy, good cop before he started to go up. Then politics stretched out its beckoning claw and a good cop became a wardheeler, a gobetween, a member of the political board of directors.

I said, trying to get his goat: "You insinuated as much, chie--"

"I never insinuate," he barked. "I let you know exactly what's what." He came closer, his breath falling off at my ears. ."And I'll let you know what's what..."

He did. I moved my head just as I saw his left shoulder lower. A flash of white—a fist—came up fast, skinned my beard, clipped my ear and ended going northeast.

ROCKED back, swung my body around, and with the same lunge, my hand swept out, grabbed the baseball statue and held it up. I could feel my pulse quickening, my face redden with anger. We stood a couple feet apart

—a big, powerfully built police chief, his breath coming in short hisses, his eyes straining, his big hands tensed, ready to strike again; and a tall, lanky, hundred and eighty pounds of what I liked to think was coordinated muscle, waiting the next move.

I knew him to have killed a man with one punch. The minutes dragged, pulling the seconds with them. When I noticed his breath come easier, I relaxed, put the gold statue back on the desk, dropped my hands and stepped back. If he hit me again, I knew there never would be a chance for us again.

He finally rasped: "And I used to like you. Yeah, even when they dumped you off the force. I thought they might have been railroading you. Now, I'm not so sure—"

"I used to like you too, Sam—as a sergeant." I replied, rubbing my bruised cheekbone. "I used to like the way you suddenly developed a desire to work cross-word puzzles and went to night school," I added, "so you could get ahead—get a better vocabulary—make a better cop out of yourself. What happened, Sam—the string bust?"

Sam looked at me, his eyes had dulled, his breath was softer. He turned toward the window again, said: "Oh, nuts!"

Back at the window, he looked out again. Apparently nobody down below was committing any crime that needed the personal supervision of the police chief, so he came back to his desk and sat down a tired man; a man that had a lot more weight to carry on his shoulders than the odd two hundred and forty he carried for free.

He took a deep breath. "Look, Rock," he began. "I know all about your getting evidence against Lilly Custer. Evidence that made her fall look like suicide. I didn't think much of your tactics. I still don't."

"A buck's a buck, Sam."

He sat there with an unpleasant smirk on his face. He said: "Tell me something. Who's digging this pushed angle. You, or the senator?"

"The senator."

"Don't add up, Rick. It was Custer's insistence of accidental death that turned the case. Now he pops up with a murder angle. Why?"

"A dame."

That didn't faze him. His eyes remained dull. He said casually: "Dorothy Holmes?"

I wasn't giving away anything he didn't know. So I said: "Yeah. And she's plenty scared. And she carries a toy .22—"

The chief smiled like a man holding a fist of aces. "Dorothy used to work in the D.A.'s office. She has a permit for that gun."

"That wouldn't make her scared, Sam."

"I wonder what would make her scared?" Sam said almost in a whisper.

"This Holmes' dame and Senator Custer's pretty thick," I offered. "Unless she was playing him for sucker-bait, she intended to hook Custer if and when his wife would give him a divorce—after the election."

Sam's face was clean of expression. "So?"

"So Custer wants to get rid of his wife. So he hires me to dig into her past. It isn't pretty, but it isn't filthy either. She was a hotsy-totsy singer in a beerjoint years ago. That's a tough life, Sam. A gal can do a lot of things that appear bad, and yet, were not intended as such. But what I got on her should have kept her quiet—"

I paused, shifted in my chair, continued: "But apparently it didn't. She still told Custer she was going to squawk, election or no election, unless he came across with plenty—and they had a squabble."

Sam cleared his throat. "And what are you trying to tell me?"

"That Lilly Custer wasn't the type of a woman to go falling out of windows accidentally. Nor was she the type to get suicide-happy when she had the down-drag. She was pushed, Sam, pushed."

Sam didn't like that. It showed in red splotches on each side of his cheek bones. He was developing a lot of uneasiness. But his voice was under control.

"Get out of here, Rock," he said, almost gently. "You just tipped your hand. The senator, or nobody wants this case open—just you. A buck's a buck, is it? Well, you won't find seum money here. Scram, before—"

I turned, was at the door, when his voice came at me again. It wasn't gentle, it was hard and brittle, and had warning in it.

"You mess with this case, Rock, and I'll bust you—more ways than one. Consider that a favor from me—your old sergeant."

I took another look at the big man, figured he was pretty well tied up inside, and left.

OR a guy that's been through life for thirty-three years with more downs than ups. I figured I was the average sort who wouldn't bend over backwards to save a nickel, nor lean forward to polish one. After I got kicked out of the department for what was termed ethics not in conformity with police regulations—whatever that meant -I opened a private investigation agency and tried my luck. I got a brand new license, had my old police special, a .38 on a .41 frame, ready for emergencies, and had an idea that I might be able to help somebody, somewhere, somehow for a few bucks. I tried to keep

them honest bucks; but the line is thin.

and sometimes the results show a different picture.

So when Senator Custer, with an eye for the governorship, approached me with five thousand dollars for an investigation job on his wife, I thought I might be stepping over that thin line. Five grand is a lot of money.

But it wasn't so much when I discovered his wife could, and was, standing in his way to the governor's chair. She had threatened divorce, a big scandal, and a lot of other things a wife can throw in for good measure, which is sure death to a public officer.

I accepted the offer and checked up on Lilly Custer. What I found was this: Lilly Custer, before her marriage to Blaine Custer, was Lilly Langley, a torchisinger in a second-rate club called the Casa Carumba. She was a redhead with green eyes, not beautiful, but attractive as redheads can be. She had a figure that added up in the right spots and a personality that was loaded clear up to her ears. Above that she had a smart head:

And Lilly ran into trouble. A man was found shot dead in her apartment at two in the morning. Lilly pleaded self-defense and got away with it due to the efforts of the prosecuting attorney who believed her story. He was later to become the D. A., and later, senator—Blaine Custer. They were married one month after the killing. The officer on the case was a Sergeant Sam Crowder. All this was public property. No need for a private investigator to snoop.

But what I did find was that Lilly Langley had been married two years previously to a Ned Blake, a two-time loser, and had failed to divorce him when she married Custer. That made Lilly a bigamist. That should have stopped Lilly from doing anything rash against Custer—before or after the election. But it didn't. So—what did Lilly have on Blaine Custer? And that's what kept prompting me to see this deal through. Not the money or the phoney wrong-must-be righted attitude—but the fact that if Lilly Custer had committed suicide, then I was partially responsible for it—for bringing up her past. I did not want that on my conscience. The accidental fall theory was too weak to accept. People with suicidal intent are determined and practical. The second floor was not sure enough. She would have taken it from the roof.

And so my only other alternative, to clear my own feelings, was the pushed angle. And the word 'pushed' seemed to trigger a lot of emotion from Dorothy Holmes, Sam Crowder and Blaine Custer. I aimed to find out why.

My first stop was the Las Palmas Apartments. I parked my gray Plymouth coupe on the side street, walked to the corner, and through a striped gold and brown canopy that stretched from the building and rested on two poles at the curb. A brown mat and a wine colored rug, two inches thick, silenced my feet just as I entered the lobby.

Three people were in the lobby. There were two old ladies knitting, and a man with ankle-high shoes reading a newspaper. Four, if you counted the baldheaded, sandy-mustached man by the manager's sign, bending over and shaking his head at the cigarettes around the bottom base of the Majolica jar—a result of bad marksmanship.

He turned toad-like eyes on me as I advanced with a grin. I told him I was from the city's Power and Light Department and was checking up on electrical fixtures. I told him I would rather check on empty apartments so as not to bother the occupants. He thought that considerate.

"Is this a new procedure?" he asked.

I nodded. "Fire Department's on our tails."

Suddenly he seemed all upset. There were no empty apartments.

"How about apartments where the

"How about apartments where the people are out of town, on vacation, or something?" I added.

He brightened, then the light faded fast on his face. I edged him on. "Well— I haven't all day. Either I get an apartment empty or bother the occupants. And maybe—" I threw in a devil look— "some may not like the intrusion . ."

He decided. He reached back behind a swinging board and obtained a key on a tag. It had 206 on it. I liked that.

"This apartment," he muttered as he came from behind the desk and walked toward the elevator, "belongs—er—belonged to Mrs. Custer. You might have heard—accidental fall. Terrible. Terrible."

I said, "Tough," and let it go at that. The elevator was a two by four automatic affair. The manager pressed a button and we stopped opposite number 206.

ment house deal with the usual type of furniture, buffed walls and white, cracked ceiling. A row of windows ran across one side of the living room with drapes hanging like starched wall paper framing either side. Wall brackets furnished the light and I glanced at them with professional interest. The bedroom was to the right and contained a double-size bed, dresser and vanity. It had a window and curtains. I unserewed a light bulb, looked into the socket, just to satisfy the manager who was breathing over my shoulder.

The small dinette, off the living room and part of the kitchen, occupied most of my observation. It was from this window, looking out over the concrete driveway, that Lucy Custer had accidentally fallen. A new screen was already in.

I could see where it was possible for a person to fall out. It was a rather large window, sill about two feet from the floor, and a sudden trip or stumble and one might go through. There was no railing or protection. Once outside that window, one was out, period.

I looked out, forgetting my electrical duties, and discovered two important things. One—the fall, from the two stories was not too high a drop, but sufficient to kill a person because of the concrete; two—because of the high shrubbery by the walk, I could only see the tops of the parked cars, but from one of the cars I saw the tips of front and rear buggy-whips belonging to a police prowl car's communication system. I figured my search was about over.

I went back into the living room, looked in the bedroom, then back to the dinette. Something was wrong with this room! Somewhere in the back of my head, was the idea that this room— Lilly Custer's—was all wrong. Something just didn't fit.

But I didn't have time to sit down on the couch and play games with my brain. Any minute I suspected cops from the prowl car downstairs to do some checking up—on me.

So I told the manager everything was okeydoke, went out the back entrance, passed an appraising eye at the tall smoke stack used on the incinerator, and came out on the side street. I got into my car, wheeled it around, and headed in the opposite direction of the main street and where I had seen the prowl car parked.

Crowder hadn't wasted any time in having me tailed. Maybe I was supposed to know something.

I got home, noticed the dust on my one and only table an inch thick and the sunlight trying to sneak in between the window and the shade I forgot to pull up when I left earlier in the morning. I pulled the shade up.

I went to the phone and dialed a number belonging to the D.A.'s office. I got Bob Anderson, an assistant D.A. and a friend of my department days. Bob seemed cordial—the first voice that sounded human all morning.

"This Dorothy Holmes, Custer's secretary," I prompted, "used to work in your office, years ago. Can you get some info on her for me?"

Bob's cordial voice tightened. "Depends, Rock."

"You must have it on your records," I added. "When she started to work for the D.A., what she did before, and when she quit?"

Bob said: "Guess we can supply that—"

"And where she lived at the time? O.K.?"

Bob said: "O.K."

I hung up, then noticed the rug three feet away. It had two ankle-high shoes on it. My eyes climbed fast, stopped fast, looked into a hole owned by a 45 army gun, and hung. Gradually they crawled up, past a blue tie, white collar, small chin, knife-thin lips that gashed across a nasty face.

His eyes were gray, blurred by a cataract that made his left eye opaque. They were mean, determined eyes. I knew him. He was the man in the lobby at the Las Palmas apartments.

He was about forty-five, heavy and jerky, and business-like with the .45. His sideburns were clipped clean and his hair matted on top.

"You," he crackled. "You and me's gonna have a talk."

I swallowed. "Sit down and make yourself at home."

He didn't sit down or make himself at home. He made himself dangerous as he wiggled that gun in my face; its sight looking into my eye. He was nervous enough to be formidable.

"You're a pretty nosey, joe," he said in a voice as dry as a popcorn burp. "Smart too. I liked that electrician's gag. Smart. I tried it here. It worked. That's how I got in here and waited for you in the kitchen—if you're interested—"

I didn't reply. He had the gun, the floor, and the right of way. But I figured I had him pegged.

Suddenly he got mad. He shoved the gun sight forward, two inches short of my nose. "Say something smart."

I said something smart. "You—Ned Blake?"

He hesitated. I didn't know whether the gun was coming through my nose or a bullet. Then he drew back, took a breath and wheezed it out stale and smelly.

"You got it, pal. Ned Blake. You're a cute one. Figure that one out for me, pal?"

I swallowed again. "Ned Blake, Lilly's husband and two-time loser. Checked up on him back in Illinois. First time in Stateville he tried jumping a wall. Result: two broken ankles. People don't wear high shoes nowadays unless they work in them or have weak ankles—"

His right eye—the good one—brightened. It might have been admiration, or it might have been determination. "You're smart all right. Smart and awfully funny. Funny as a louse, pal. You dug me up, eh? Had it thrown into Lilly's face—"

I knew what was coming. I felt a glob of perspiration drop into my clenched hand.

"Now Lilly's gone," he chuckled. The chuckle was more of a hangman's sneer, "And me pension's gone. Lilly had herself a nice set-up against somebody here, pal, and I had a nice set-up against Lilly, But it's gone, You know why? Because some smart joe gets smart..."

some smart joe gets smart—"
"What was Lilly's set-up?" I ven-

tured.

He shook his head. "I wish I knew,
pal. I wish I knew." He wiggled the

gun. "You tell me, pal—"

"I wish I knew, pal," I mocked. "I wish I knew."

"You don't scare easy, do you, pal?" he said softly.

My palms were perfectly wet by now. Suddenly he went rigid. His hand clutched the gun, his trigger-finger seemed a claw. His eyes were round slates.

"You fingered me," he snapped. "For who? You wanted something on Lilly. So you got me. Who for, pal?"

I just kept looking at his eyes. It was the best place to look. Looking into the barrel made me sweat more; it was like looking into the next world.

I said: "Better put that gun away. You're a two-time loser."

I said the wrong thing. His face twitched. Both eyes fogged. It was hard to tell which had the cataract.

"You shouldn't have said that, pal," he whispered. "Lilly's gone, see. No more protection for me. I'm washed up. But I got one chance left. Just one. I gotta know Lilly's set-up. And you're gonna tell me. pal—now!"

I tried to look dumb. It was easy, but it wasn't successful. He didn't like the attempt. He showed his displeasure with a sudden lunge. I felt the cold gun rake against my nose. I heard it crunch. Then a shot of hot, searing pain. A black streak of nothing blinded my eyes and I felt my head blow up.

I didn't hear the shot.

I instinctively kicked out, contacted a shin, went forward and started swinging, hard.

Darkness—streaked with black and pinkish flares—possessed with madness. My hands had him. I felt something soft, wooly like clothes, then spongy, like skin. The room was deep, endless like a tunnel without a beginning or end —stale and smelly.

I clawed and punched and kicked and bit. Anything—in the dark. In spots like this you don't have time to think about rules and sportsmanship. No audience, just madness with pain; blood filled with hate and the instinct to strike back—to kill. It was strictly primitive.

There was something far away—like a small light at the end of a tunnel; only it wasn't light—it was feeling. It was contact with the brain. Something belonging to me—this body—was also attending pain. Dimly I began to realize I had lost my hands.

I felt my face against something sticky. My shoulders were too big for me, and my hands—where were they?

Y MOUTH was full of blotters, and I was lying down, looking up through two slits in brown mounds. I saw a bluish sky with two suns—bluish suns—staring at me. I groaned, moved slightly and realized the sky had a whitish edging. I heard something in the distance—about two million miles away.

I strained my eyes—seemed to push them beyond the mounds. The vision cleared and through the mounds two blue eyes on bluish sockets were looking at me. There was a white cap framing black hair. I was looking up at a nurse. She was smiling buck teeth. She wasn't pretty at all.

The nurse bent over and said: "Take it easy-"

It was a silly remark.

It got all black again, and two days later I awoke to find out the score. I was in a hospital with a broken hand, a busted nose, severe lacerations about the head and bruises on the body. That was the least of it. I was also under guard. And I got it straight from the guard. He was a rosy-cheeked, flat-faced detective named Boots Shack. I knew him. The kind of a cop that carried ordinances in his head instead of ideas. And according to Shack it happened this way: I had a fight with Ned Blake, a man with a record, in an effort to force information from him. When he refused me there was a scuffle. The scuffle brought the police. I shot and killed Blake with a .38 bullet through his skull. The bullet was from my gun. When the police came, I tried to get away and

ran in front of an oncoming prowl car.

It looked bad. But there wasn't much
I could do about it, and I was too weak
to care.

I went back to sleep.

The second awakening got me Bob Anderson of the D.A.'s office. Bob was a short, stocky chap, wore glasses, had a round face, and for a D.A. he looked happy. He had two wonderful kids and a swell wife. Maybe that did it.

He informed me that I was being held without bail, charged with the murder of Ned Blake, that the police department gave the D.A. a solid case, and what were my last words.

I said; "Go to hell!"

He laughed. He sat on my bed, out of earshot of the guard or nurse, and muttered: "Dorothy Holmes came to work for the D.A. in September of forty-six—as secretary to Blaine Custer . . ."

"That was just after the shooting affair of Lilly's, wasn't it?" I interrupted.

He nodded. "She used to work as cashier at the Casa Carumba in the evenings. Went to commercial school days..."

My head jerked up on that. My head reeled and slapped rivets into my brain. I slowly lay back on the pillow.

"-and she lives, or lived at the Las Palmas Apartments, apartment 606-" I sat up again—quick. All the rivets in my brain pounded, then rolled around and settled. Nothing like a good knock on the head to give you an idea. I had an idea. A good one. I touched Bob's arm with my plastered hand.

"Let's get out of here, Bob," I gasped.
"I think I got it . . ."

Bob placed a hand on my chest. "Easy, Rock—you can't—"

I said it again. "Go to hell! I'm getting out." I pushed Bob aside, got to the floor, stood up and then someone pulled the floor from underneath me. I fell into Bob's arms.

Ten minutes later I tried to do it over again.

"Bob, get me a writ, or something. I gotta get out of here."

"No can do. You're tight in here."

"How about Blaine Custer? He's got

Bob shook his head in negation. It was a nice frame. Blaine had said I was on my own; Crowder said he would bust me.

Boots Shack came over, cocked his head, and said: "Don't give me any trouble, Rock. I like you—but don't give me any trouble."

I was a nice guy. Everybody told me they liked me. But nobody was doing anything to prove it.

I sat on the edge of the bed, with my feet dangling. "Look fellas," I said. "This is a frame. I gotta get out of here. I want to see the senator." I addressed my blackened eyes toward Shack. "I work for the senator, He's a client of mine. That get me anything in your book, Boots?"

"Nothing."

I looked at Bob. "What happens, Bob, when I get released from this chophouse?"

"You're to be taken to jail and held incommunicado. Why?"

"In your custody?"

Bob said, cautiously: "Could be arranged."

"Now wait a minute—" Boots iniected.

I yelled at the nurse, "Get me a doc.

I'm leaving—"

Her blue eyes got bluer, her buck teeth jumped at me as her line draw

teeth jumped at me as her lips drew back. "Impossible," she snapped. I yelled some more, much louder, and

touched it off with a little high class swearing. It got the doctor.

He examined me. I said it didn't hurt

He examined me. I said it didn't nurt when it did; I stood on my feet until I thought the walls would cave in on me —but I managed to keep up.

I got my release from the hospital.

When Boots went for my clothes, I took Bob aside and asked him to give me a break. To take me up to the Las Palmas apartment on the way to the jail. Bob didn't like the idea, but agreed finally.

Boots was all for taking me straight to jail. Bob threw some technical terms at him, which caused Boots to shut up.

I suggested we go to the police garage and pick up a car, just to satisfy some of Boots' feelings. It worked.

At the police garage, Boots was signing for a car as Bob and I walked throught the damp, concrete spaces where the prowl cars were lined up, neatly, like obedient soldiers. We came to the one I was looking for.

It was over in a corner space, away from the rest and had a sign attached to its door. It said: Out of Service.

Its left fender in front was smashed. There were red-caked blood stains still on the fender, the bumper, and on the headlight and lens. My blood. Some of my hair, a few strands, was still sticking to the lens.

The attendant, a tall, gawky man in white coveralls, came sauntering over. He squinted at me and let out a whistle. "Cripes! That you, Rock?"

I smiled. My jaw felt like rubber bands stretching.

He waved a hand. "Well this is the baby you ran into, Rock. Being held as people's exhibit A." He laughed. It was a big joke to him.

I kept looking at the car. There was something wrong with it, Like there was something wrong in Lilly Custer's room. Then I knew what was wrong with this prop.

In an apparent fit of temper, I shoved the heel of my good hand against the lens with the blood on it. It smashed. I got a cut hand for my effort. I got something else, too. I got what I wanted to know.

The attendant's face took on red. He took a step forward and swore at me. I walked away with Bob and got into the waiting police car. Boots drove away.

In the car, Bob said: "Why did you do that?"

I grinned.

Bob sat back, folded his hands and thought it over. I don't think he was happy.

HE lobby of the Las Palmas was was empty. The manager was busily engaged in adoring a swatch of tapestry, when we shadowed his vision. He looked up, saw me, became startled.

"I touched a live wire," I explained.
"Is 606 occupied?"

He said: "Yes, it is, I can't-"

Bob shoved his badge authoritatively under his nose. "I'm from the D.A.'s office. Anybody in 606 now?"

The manager's mustache twitched—all five hairs. "Anything wrong?" He clutched at the swatch, added: "Miss Holmes just returned from a trip. She is—"

All three of use were by the elevator by the time he finished stammering.

I said to Bob: "Automatic elevator."

We got in, I pushed a button and we stopped at two. I said: "Lilly Custer's apartment." The door closed, I pressed six. Bob kept looking at me, trying to figure my angle. Boots gave a good impression of impatience.

Apartment 606's door opened to our ring. Dorothy Holmes stood framed in the door. She looked, did a double-take, then stared.

Even as she stared she was beautiful. She appeared tail in the doorway and her black hair was changed from a severe hairdo to a slow curl resting upon her shoulders. Her dress was a grayish print with abstract black designs running all over, and it fitted her very affectionately around the curves. She had a reddish jacket with large pockets. Her eyes were grayish-green and she turned them on us, slowly, evenly; then they rested on me.

I said: "It's me. The clever Jimmy Rock."

She teetered on her heels for the moment. Her mouth opened, closed, opened again—wider.

"Oh!" she cried. "No!"

She seemed sincerely depressed by my condition.

By this time we were in her apartment, and this was an apartment! This set-up, atructurally, was the same as Lilly Custer's, but the motif was different. The walls were chocolate and chartreuse in the living room. There was a low, modern chartreuse couch placed against the chocolate wall, with an easy chair of the same color near by. There were blonde end tables on either side of the couch with heavy, square, ceramic lamp bases with bas-relief figures and green shades. Very nice.

The windows were draped and corniced of cream and terra cotta with llama fringe. Very, very nice.

I sat down on the soft couch, looked at a silver Buddha for a cigarette lighter. A teakwood eigarette box lay beside it on the blond cocktail table.

For some reason this room looked right. Just right. I looked at the windows again—French windows. That was the difference between Lily Custer's setup and this. And that was the answer I was after. French windows!

Bob had been talking to Dorothy Holmes and she glanced at me while he spoke. Boots was fascinated by a yellow Mexican mask hung on the wall.

Dorothy came up to me. "What happened?"

I said: "Suppose you tell me."

"I—I don't understand. Mr. Anderson just said you were being held for—"
she hesitated— "murder." She didn't
like the sound of the word any more
than I.

She sank into the coral chair near me, put her hands together, and leveled her eyes to mine.

I worked my jaw a couple of times until I felt it could stand a few paragraphs of conversation. Then I said: "You know a Ned Blake?"

She shook her head. "No."

"You used to work at the Casa Carumba."

She whispered: "Yes."

"Tell me about it." Her hands went up and down in a

useless gesture. "There's nothing to tell. I studied typing and shorthand in the daytime, worked as a cashier later."

"You know Lilly Langley, then?"

"Certainly. She was the singer. I think she was a co-owner."

I eased back into the cushions, "Lilly Langley ran into trouble. A man was shot in her apartment at about two in the morning—after the show. According to records, one month later you applied for a position with the D.A.'s office and started to work as Blaine Custer's secretary." I watched her expression. There was nothing there. "Any connection?" She got up, walked over to the teakwood box, extracted a cigarette, took the Buddha, twisted its head and flame spurted out. She said to Bob: "Is this questioning necessary?"

"No," he replied. "Just that Rock's in a tight spot and he thinks he can get out of it. I'm giving him that chance. Suit yourself."

She blew a lot of smoke and seemed interested in the thin ribbons that floated upward. Then she strode over to the door leading into her bedroom, turned, leaned against the door, folded her arms and her eyes played with me.

She was going to tell me something. She didn't get the chance.

KEY rattled in the door; it flung open and Blaine Custer appeared. His face was drained

a marble white. Behind him—Sam Crowder. Crowder's bulk smashed into the room. His face was bathed in perspiration, his large hands were wet with sweat, and his breath was rapid, as if he had been running all the way from headquarters. When he spoke, his voice was loud, mixed with gravel and angry.

"How'd you get out of the hospital?"
He shouted at me. He whirled on Boots.
"I thought I told you..."

"I thought I told you—"
Boots' hand came up passively: "It's
Anderson. Chief. I—I tried to get hold

of you from the garage—"
Crowder turned on Anderson, hands
clenched fast.

Anderson stood by the window, hands in pockets, eyes dead. Blaine Custer, Crowder, and Anderson looked at each other. Neither of them spoke.

It was a good spot for me to trigger an idea.

"Well, well," I managed. "The old story. Back to the scene of the crime."

That got their attentions. Custer's lip did its usual sag; Dorothy Holmes straightened up, slipped one hand in her jacket pocket; Bob's eyes remained dead. Boots' mouth hung open, and Crowder's lips snarled back over his teeth.

He hissed: "Yeah? Yeah?"

I tried a grin. It was more of a sneer. "You've pulled too tight this time, Sam. The string broke—"

Sam's eyes jerked to slits. I reached my good hand for the teakwood box and a cigarette. Sam's hand swept out, knocked the box on the floor. Cigarettes bounced all over the rug.

"Say that again-" he warned.

Dorothy came over quickly, bent down, picked up the cigarettes and put them back in the box. She was between us. She took out a fresh cigarette, put it in my mouth, twisted the Buddha head and I got a light.

Then she turned to Sam. "This is my apartment, Sam. Jimmy Rock's my guest."

Sam sneered. "Guest?" He laughed and the tension passed. "Hell—he's the state's guest from now on."

So I said it once more: "The string's busted Sam. Your frame won't hold."

Dorothy stayed between us.

I said: "Look, Sam. This Ned Blake came to me with a gun—a A6 army deal. He was Lilly Custer's first husband. The guy she ditched for Blaine without the formalities of a divorce. The evidence I got for Blaine. It should have held Lilly in tow—but it didn't. Bigamy's a tough charge—but that didn't stop her—"

Custer came forward, breathing hard, his face now a damp plaster color. He was going to say something, changed his mind, just let his mustache quiver a bit.

I continued: "Anyway, this Blake, a two-time loser had something on Lilly this bigamy charge. She was paying him to keep still, or keep away, or disappear, I don't know about that. But he came here to protect himself. He wanted to know from me what Lilly's set-up was. It must have been a good one, Sam, because he seemed to think it was a ticket to paradise—"

Custer made a movement forward, but Sam brushed him aside. "Let him blow," Sam grunted.

So I blew some more, "Blake thought I was hedging on him. He smashed my nose with the gun, After that I don't remember much."

"You don't have to," Sam informed me. "We got it on record. You shot and killed him. Then you tried to get away and crashed into an oncoming police car that was coming to the scene."

I emptied a long exhale of smoke. My lungs felt filled with rust. I said: "It won't hold."

Sam stormed: "The hell it won't!"

Bob Anderson came up, his eyes showed a little life. "You got something better, Rock?"

"Yeah, I was told to lay off the Lilly Custer case by Sam. Sam said he'd bust me more ways than one. All right, So I don't lay off the case. So I'm tailed by the department when I come up to Lilly's apartment. Her apartment on the second floor doesn't look right to me. When I go home I meet this Ned Blake. After he smashed me with the gun I grabbed him and we have a fight. didn't shoot him and I didn't run away. My gun was taken and used to kill Blake. Maybe I was roughed up morea lot more. Then I was dragged out and laid in front of a prowl car to look like I was running away." I stopped and took another breather, then 'added: "And I can prove it!"

Bob exclaimed: "Prove it! How?"

"You remember the prowl car in the garage, Bob? You saw the dented fender and the blood—my blood, on the fender and bumper—some of my hair on the headlight lens. You remember me shoving my hand on that lens and it broke into pieces? O.K., Bob, tell me this. If I ran into the prowl car hard enough to dent the fender and my head hit the headlight—how come the lens wasn't busted?"

USTER turned to Sam. "Sam, you shouldn't have—"

Sam snapped. "Keep your damn mouth shut. I'll handle this punk . . ."

Custer froze. Sam took a heavy step forward. He stopped, stepped back surprised. Dorothy's back was in front of me—between Sam and me. Her elbow was bent and I think Sam was looking at her toy. 22 that she had in her hand.

Without turning, she addressed me over her shoulder: "Go ahead, Rock-"

I said: "Suppose you tell me what you were going to—before we were interrupted."

She kept the gun on Sam. "O.K. I worked as a cashier at the Carumba. I met Blaine Custer there. He was there

every night. He was mad about Lilly—"
"Was he there the night of the shooting?"

She hesitated. She cleared a lump from her throat. "He was at the club, but he left earlier. After the tragedy, of the Carumba was closed and I looked for a full time job. I knew Blaine Custer, so I went up to his office and asked for a job. I got it."

"Tell me," I asked. "Why did you skip from his apartment to the hotel?"

Custer interrupted in a pleading, frightened voice. "Dorothy—you don't have to answer. You're not on a stand."

"Blaine called me by phone," she continued, disregarding Custer's plea, "and said he had a terrific quarrel with Lilly. That Lilly knew about us and she was going to cause trouble. He thought it best if I packed up immediately and left the apartment—until things blew over."

"This was the afternoon-the same

afternoon Lilly fell out of her window?"
"Yes."

Dorothy's back was still blocking my vision, but I could see Custer's pasty face mottled with fear.

I said: "Custer, you murdered your wife, Lilly Custer. Then pushed her out of the window to make it look like an accidental fall—or even suicide if need be. Only you didn't push her through her apartment on the second floor—you pushed her through this one! You slipped when you told me about the quarrel and said Lilly fell through a French window. There are no French windows in 206. But there are here.

"You strangled Lilly in 206, thought the fall from two stories wouldn't cover up your marks sufficiently, so you hurriedly phoned Dorothy, got her out of 606, took the elevator up with Lilly—"

Custer fell apart, "No!" He shouted.
"No. It's wrong. I didn't touch Lilly....
I swear. We had a quarrel... Sam accidentally hit her—broke her neck..."

Sam yelled and tugging at his belt, lunged at Custer. "You weak-kneed, yellow Casonova! Dame-happy! Go on spill your guts out. Go on! Tell about you and Ramsey—" Sam was smiling, thinly, tautly, his hand near his belt.

The .22 spit again, spun Sam around, and he swung up with a gun in his right hand. His thumb jerked the safety catch.

Sam's gun roared. Custer stiffened in a short, dynamic action.

Sam's gun caught him once more. Custer's face turned to suet. Blood trickled from his mouth, drooled in uneventhreads down his chin. He slumped.

Dorothy's third shot got Sam in the temple. He turned horrible eyes on her. His big frame started to slowly revolve, then toppled, went down.

I got up and walked over to the bodies, I said: "Got enough, Bob?"

Bob scratched his head, took off his glasses, wiped them, put them back on,

and said: "Too much. This is going to raise the roof." He turned to Dorothy, smiled, and said: "Nice shooting."

Dorothy's eyes were a washed-out hazel. She was breathing hard, trying to pull herself together. The gun was still in her hand, hot as sin, and curling smoke. Her breasts were heaving.

She pulled herself together after a few minutes of taking long breathes. Then she said: "I always suspected Custer and Sam and Lilly to have something in common. The next day, after the killing, I went to the Club and saw the three of them in the office, and they were excited and slammed the door."

"This man—the one that was killed," Bob asked. "Did you know him?"

"Yes. Bill Ramsey. He was a young, good-looking waiter at the Club. Antother of Lilly's conquests. She didn't care—as long as they wore pants. Custer was crazy about her and jealous."
"And later you went up to the office.

asked Blaine Custer for a job, and got it

—just like that?" Bob commented.

"Yes. It seemed Blaine thought I knew something."

"I think." Bob said, eyeing me, "that Custer shot this Ramsey when he caught him with Lilly, and Crowder and Lilly covered up for him. Only Lilly was using it as a bleed. Sam made chief out of it. But Lilly's hold was big enough to offset the bigamy charge you brought up, eh Rock?"

But a few things bothered me. How I was going to get my five thousand from Blaine Custer for evidence against Lilly? Dead men can't welsh. And why did Dorothy Holmes shoot at Sam Crowder so quickly when he turned on Custer, after Custer's accusation. I think she meant to get Sam on that first shot. I think she meant to save Blaine's hide, let Sam take the raps, because she had the sweetest black-malling racket in the world—an old man's lovel (Continued from page 7)

5

Where the laws of a state provide for capital punishment upon conviction for murder in the first degree, there is a saving provision for a sentence to life imprisonment if the jury recommends mercy in its verdict. Such is the law in Ohio. Recently a man charged with first degree murder was tried before a court of three judges, his counsel having waived a jury as provided by law and making the trial before the judges mandatory. The judges rendered a verdict of guilty of murder in the first degree. No mention was made of a recommendation of mercy, but the judges announced that sentence would be passed some ten days later. There was confusion in the courtroom, and even some lawyers were at a loss to know whether the failure of the three judges to recommend mercy was equivalent to the failure of a jury to recommend mercy. The story was rushed to the press without a definite statement as to the significance of the judges' verdict, and for days the question was argued: could the judges sentence the accused to life imprisonment. or had their failure to recommend mercy committed them to the death sentence? What do you think?

- 6

In one of our great states the law provides that whoever shall carry a firearm concealed upon his person is guilty of a misdemeanor. The law further provides that if the accused has been convicted of a prior crime of carrying concealed weapons on his person, or of a felony, then he shall be guilty of a felony upon conviction. The difference is important, for a misdemeanor means only a jail sentence and fine while conviction of a felony is punishable by not less than one year in the penitentiary.

Let us assume that you are the defense attorney for James Dones who is charged with carrying concealed weapons. There is no mention in the indictment of a prior conviction of James on such a charge, and no mention of his prior conviction of a felony. The district attorney attempts to introduce evidence, however, that your client had indeed been convicted of carrying concealed weapons and that he had even been convicted of a felony. Assuming the judge permits the introduction of such evidence and that it is indisputable, will the judge (1) instruct the jury that if they find James Dones had been previously convicted of carrying concealed weapons or (2) previously convicted of a felony, they should find him guilty of a felony as a second offender-if they convict him for the present offense?

7

One of the questions most frequently asked lawvers is whether they would take the case of a man whom they believed to be guilty of the crime of which he was charged. Almost invariably the lawyer will piously answer in the negative; he simply couldn't put his heart and soul in the defense of a man whom he knew to be guilty. We will not attempt to estimate how many times this answer is pure hokum or how many times it is sincere. It is certainly good politics and the discreet answer to give for a lawver never knows when the questioner will sit on some jury before which he is trying a criminal case.

Now what do you think—do you think that all lawyers should refuse to take the case of a man they believed guilty?

You are defense counsel for Willie the Weasel, charged with murder in the first degree. After careful consideration of all the damaging evidence against Willie you decide to plead him guilty. In compliance with the law of your state. the jury is dismissed and two additional judges are appointed by the supreme court to sit with the trial judge and decide the one remaining issue-whether Willie will go to the chair or get off with life. You do your best for Willie, but the judges listen adamantly. They find him guilty of murder in the first degree without a recommendation of mercy. Your motion for a new trial is denied. and Willie is doomed to the chair. You appeal to the higher court. The D.A. protests the appeal, arguing that since your client pled guilty he has no right to appeal. Does Willie have a right to appeal after a plea of guilty to murder in the first degree? If he does have such a right, can the reviewing court soften the verdict by holding that Willie should be accorded mercy and thus escape the death penalty?

.

As everybody knows, every accused man is entitled to representation by counsel. Let us consider an actual case in which we will use the fictitious name of Bill Loop for the accused and Joe Lane for his attorney. During the trial Lane cooperated with the prosecuting attorney in almost every way possible, by failing to object to questions calling for incompetent evidence, by failing to cross-examine prosecution witnesses, by failing to present what evidence he had and even by failing to file a motion for a new trial when his client was speedily convicted. Bill Loop's relatives hired another lawyer and Lane was fired. The new lawyer filed an appeal on the ground that Loop had been deprived of his constitutional right to counsel. The prosecuting attorney argued that this right had not been deprived Loop, that though his counsel might not have earned his money, he still had an attorney. How did the higher court decide this case?

10

You are defense counsel for Richard Roen, accused of murder in the first degree. Since evidence against him is conclusive, you plead him guilty, and the court hears testimony to determine whether Roen will get the chair or life. As defense counsel, you offer expert witnesses to prove that Roen was insane at the time when he committed his crime. Because of this insanity, you argue, the court should recommend mercy for Roen. The prosecuting attorney objects to the expert witnesses testifying to Roen's insanity. Will the judges sustain the objection or overrule it?

### Answers to Preceding Questions

Hire any one of them-in the United States there is no distinction between a lawyer, an attorney, an attorney-at-law, a barrister, a solicitor or an attorney and counsellor-at-law. In England, a solicitor is a practicing attorney not permitted to plead at the bar-that is, appear in court; while a barrister may do so. These English terms are seldom used in the United States, but it beats all how many times a client will ask you: "Are you a lawyer or an attorney?" Almost invariably persons so questioning will vaguely rate an attorney higher than a lawyer, And some feel that an attorney and counsellor-at-law is higher than both. The pay-off is the layman who believes a notary public is a person of greater learning and greater legal training than a lawyer.



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2

Only example 3 is direct evidence; all the rest are circumstantial. Perhaps this will illustrate how much circumstantial evidence is relied on for proof of guilt. Though man is a vain animal, he is averse to committing his crimes in public.

3

No, the judge will not grant your request. Regardless of whether the evidence is all circumstantial or all direct or a mixture of both, the jury must be convinced of the accused's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt before a verdict of guilty is justified. In a case founded on circumstantial evidence, it is frequently charged that the facts proved must be inconsistent with the hypothesis that the accused is innocent, that every other hypothesis excepting guilt must be excluded.

4

The judge will sustain the objection and refuse to permit you to introduce testimony about Elmer's pricing Cadillacs. Though Elmer's knowledge of his partner's will naming him a beneficiary is a circumstance admissible against him as proving malice, a circumstance must be proved by facts, not other circumstances. It is axiomatic that an inference cannot be proved by another inference. The jury may infer that Elmer murdered his partner with hope to gain from his partner's will, but it may not infer that such was his motive from an inference that he knew about the will. Each circumstance must be proved by facts.

.

By failing to recommend mercy the judges had committed themselves to

sentencing the accused man to death. They took the place of a jury, and their verdict had the same effect as a jury's verdict. The absence of a recommendation of mercy in the verdict automatically prescribed the sentence which they would later pronounce on the defendant.

6

In either case the judge would be in error if he charged the jury that they could consider proof of a prior conviction of carrying concealed weapons or a prior conviction of a felony to warrant conviction of James Dones as a felon in this instance. The fact that neither prior conviction was alleged in the indictment against Joe saves him. He can only be convicted for a misdemeanor, for that's all he was charged with. An accused man has a right to know the score against him when he goes

to trial, and the indictment must show the score.

7

If you do, you believe that accused men should be deprived of their constitutional rights—if they are guilty. The constitution of the United States and the individual states provides that every man accused of crime shall be entitled to benefit (or handicap) of counsel. Now, if you castigate the entire legal profession for defending men of whose guilt there can be no doubt, you object to its exercise of a sacred duty, the preservation of constitutional rights.

A lawyer may well feel revulsion at the guilt of a criminal, and he is not obligated to defend such a criminal if his conscience forbids his doing so. But far better for an honest lawyer to preserve the constitutional right of a guilty man than a shyster.



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Yes, Willie has a right to the review of a higher court even though he has pled guilty to murder in the first degree. It is always possible that the higher court will find that some error was had in the proceedings against him, even though his plea of guilty has waived most procedural error. It could have been, for example, that the plea of guilty was taken inadvisably by the judge—Willie not having been fully warned of the consequences of his plea.

With regard to the second question, either a negative or an affirmative answer is correct, depending on the law of each particular state. Ordinarily no higher court will modify a death sentence, unless the discretion of the trial court has been obviously abused. In the State of Ohio, for example, it has been held that the higher court does not have the right to modify such a death sentence, that the sentence is completely discretionary with such court. The Ohio courts, then, can only remand the case for new trial if they find error in the original trial.

9

The reviewing court held that Bill Loop had in fact been deprived of his constitutional right. Joe Lane's efforts on his behalf had been so pittifully inadequate that he had in effect had no legal representation at all. Loop was accordingly granted a new trial.

10

The judges will sustain the objection for a plea of guilty to murder in the first degree waives all defenses—including that of insanity. It admits that the defendant was sane and closes the door against evidence of insanity.

THE END



#### THE BLOODY BOKHARA

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(Continued from page 66)

Herro turned to face him as I rose, to get away from behind Claire. Herro's gun was pointing at Selak, and Herro talked to him in broken Armenian.

Selak kept coming—and the gun jumped in Herro's hand.

Selak trembled as the slug hit him, but he kept coming. I was almost to Herro, now; I grabbed his wrist and twisted it as Selak closed.

The gun fell to the floor, but Selak's big arm sent me sprawling.

Then Selak had lifted George off his feet by the throat and one leg, and he lifted him high.

I heard Claire scream as Selak headed for the terrace doors, still carrying the struggling Herro high above his head.

I was up as Selak smashed through the doors, kicking them open. I was up and scrambling after him . . .

I was out on the terrace and shouting at Selak as he stood there on the edge and now Herro was screaming.

I reached Selak, grabbed him blindly by the neck from behind—just as he tossed George Herro over the edge...

Waldorf came five minutes later. I'd called the ambulance by that time for Selak. Somebody had called the police.

I told Waldorf all about it, and Claire told him her part, not sparing herself. Selak died, in the hospital, while we were still talking.

When we'd finished, Waldorf said:
"I'll do what I can, but you can count
on five years, anyway, Miss Lynne."

Papa says I'm foolish. He says all young men have experiences of one kind or another, and the thing to do is to forget them. He says there's no sense in writing to her every week, up there, and going up, once a month. Papa says five years is a long time for a young man to wait, an awful long time.

As though I don't know it.

THE END

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#### CURTIS CLUEF

(Continued from page 35)

thing is a signed agreement between Scngler and Shields to split your earnings, leaving you little more than expenses. Sengler got the blame but they've been working together from the beginning."

Shields rose to his feet and I followed him.

He said: "Are you fool enough to think you can get away with a thing like that?"

I eved him sardonically, "I had the whole thing pinned on Sengler until you sent those sunburned lads with the Vine Street drapes out to protect your interests. If there was one thing Sengler didn't have to import, it was extra gunmen."

Shields paled.

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I said: "Thompson probably hasn't been able to get in touch with you. Ernie's dead-"

I had wanted it to work out this way and I had a swell plan. I had my glass in my left hand as did Shields. As soon as his right hand moved in the direction of a possible gun, I was going to let him have the glass in his face and go for my own gun.

His right hand moved exactly according to schedule. I guess I was tired. I had overlooked the fact that Shields could pull the same stunt. He did and his own gun came out. I threw myself on him and Jeanne clawed at him from the other side.

The three of us wrestled to the floor before I got my hands on his gun and began to twist. Shields gave a sudden jerk, the gun roared and a surprised expression spread over Shields' face. I got to my feet as crimson began to seep through his shirt front. He looked around as at an old familiar place that he didn't expect to see again. There was no bitterness in his face, He said: "I guess I outsmarted myself. That hap129

pens to agents sometimes if they're not careful."

Jeanne sobbed: "Jock!"

He smiled at her. "I'm sorry, Jeanne. Really." A spasm of pain contorted his face, he sighed and his face smoothed out and his body relaxed quietly on the floor.

Jeanne knelt beside him, then looked up at me blankly.

"He's dead."

I nodded, helped her to her feet and put her on the sofa. Shields still clutched the gun. I got out my handkerchief, wiped the barrel clean where my hands had touched it, left it in Shields' hand.

Jeanne lay on the sofa crying softly, I went to the phone, dialed, talked fast. I hung up and called the Aladdin Hotel and finally got hold of Lieutenant Kondos. I talked a little and he talked a lot—yelled would be a better word for it.

I got tired of listening and hung up. I went over to Jeanne sitting on the sofa.

"You said you were just going to dress when I came in. Does that mean the dresses you wear in your number are here?"

She raised a tear-stained face. "You don't expect me to—" She looked at the expression on my face. "Everything is down there."

I lifted her, wiped her face with my handkerchief and led her to the front windows. "That cab driver down there is a friend of mine. His name is Barney 'Arons. I want you to slip down the service elevator and tell Barney I said to get you to the Raspail as soon as possible. You're going on tonight as though nothing had happened. You don't know anything that happened up here."

Her shoulders drooped.

"It's no use--"



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#### CURTIS CLUFF

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I shook her. "If you don't, all of this has been for nothing. Your new agent will be waiting for you in your dressing room. He's Rudy Frieden. He knows everything and he'll take care of you from that end. And don't worry abou. anything. When I finish at this end, Jock Shields will be a suicide in an unnamed apartment. He will also have been in ill health for some time."

"You can't do it. The police won't let you—"

"Let me worry about that! The cop who's coming over here is a pal of mine —or was. He has already called me a mad dog and told me that I am worse than an epidemic and I don't think he knows any new adjectives." I shoved her bag at her and opened the door. "Get going."

She clung to me in the doorway. "How can I ever-?"

"Save it till later." I extricated myself.

"But when will I see you?"

"If I can get out of this, I'll take a vacation, maybe to the Coast. Maybe I'll take you to Romanoff's on an expense account and we can talk about how wonderful we both are. Now, beat it!"

She raised herself on tiptoe, brushed her lips against mine and darted down the hall

I shut the door.

I picked up the contract, the agreement between Shields and Sengler, the balance sheet, the cnvelope and the pictures and negatives and took them into the bathroom and destroyed them. A siren began to wail as I came back to the living room.

I sat down on the sofa, lit a cigarette, took a long pull and blew smoke at the ceiling.

I was pretty sure I had earned that thousand dollar bonus.

THE END

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tree Ahead, there's a farmhouse, not yet in your view The only person who could see all three things at once... would be a man on top of the train . . . or

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Produced by ENDRE BOHEM . Directed by JOHN FARROW . Screen Play by Barré Lyndon and Jonathan Latimer



"Dandy," pedigreed white poodle, painted from life in the music room of his famous owner, Efrem Kurtz, Conductor of the Houston Symphony Orchestra.

#### "Critics praise his drinks, too, since Efrem Kurtz switched to Calvert!"

Noteworthy fact: moderate men everywhere are finding Calvert Reserve is really smoother, really milder, really better tasting. All because America's most experienced blender really dors create better-blended whiskey. Switch to Calvert Reserve—just once. You, too, will find it the most satisfying whiskey you ever tasted!



Choice Blended Whiskey - 86.8 Proof - 65% Grain Neutral Spirits . . . Calvert Distillers Corp., New York City